

May 17, 1993

**Cable, US Embassy Tallinn to the Secretary of State,
'Ambassador Strobe Talbott's Visit to Estonia'**

Citation:

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Summary:

The document reports on Strobe Talbott's May 1993 visit to Estonia, emphasizing productive meetings with Estonian leaders and members of the Russian minority. Discussions focused on regional security, Russian troop withdrawal, minority rights, and US policy in the post-Soviet landscape, with general agreement on reform support but divergence over issues like CIS peacekeeping forces.

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English

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED ADDRESSEE - USVIENNA AND
CATION)

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: CSCE, PGOV, PHUM, PREL, EN, RS
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR STROBE TALBOTT'S VISIT TO ESTONIA

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY

2. AMBASSADOR STROBE TALBOTT'S MAY 14-15 VISIT TO TALLINN WAS A
SINGULARLY SUCCESSFUL EVENT IN OUR VIEW. WITH ESTONIAN GOVERNMENT

OFFICIALS, HE CLEARED AWAY THE POST-VANCOUVER CLOUDS HERE CONCERNING U.S. POLICIES VIS-A-VIS RUSSIA AND THE BALTIC STATES. (BOTH PRESIDENT MERI AND PRIME MINISTER LAAR TOLD ME TODAY THAT THE MEETINGS HAD BEEN "EXCELLENT.") AND HIS SESSIONS WITH RUSSIAN POLITICAL LEADERS AND YOUNGER RUSSIANS GAVE THEM A CHANCE TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS, WHILE IN TURN WE UNDERLINED OUR CONCERN ABOUT THEIR PROBLEMS AS WELL AS THE NEED FOR THEM TO MOVE AHEAD IN A RESPONSIBLE MANNER IN INDEPENDENT ESTONIA.

3. WE RECOGNIZE FULLY THAT FOR GOOD LEGAL/POLITICAL/THEOLOGICAL/BUREAUCRATIC REASONS - ALL OF WHICH WE ABSOLUTELY AGREE WITH - THE BALTIC STATES ARE NOT PART OF AMBASSADOR TALBOTT'S PORTFOLIO. BUT THERE ARE A LOT OF RUSSIAN RELATED ISSUES IN THIS COUNTRY - TROOP WITHDRAWAL, THE RUSSIAN
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MINORITY, ECONOMIC TIES, ETC. - AND WE WOULD CERTAINLY BE DELIGHTED TO WELCOME HIM AGAIN IN TALLINN SOMEDAY WHEN HE IS TRAVELLING TO THIS PART OF THE WORLD. END SUMMARY.

MEETING WITH PRESIDENT MERI

4. IN AN 8:30 AM SATURDAY MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR TALBOTT, LENNART MERI (WHO HAD TO LEAVE FOR A FUNERAL IN SOUTHERN ESTONIA) PROVED TO BE MORE OF A MORNING PERSON THAN ANY OF US EVER HAD SUSPECTED. MERI ASKED WRYLY IF TALBOTT HAD COME TO TOWN TO SIGN ESTONIA'S ACCESSION TO NATO, BUT INSTEAD SETTLED FOR A SIGNED COPY OF TALBOTT'S BOOK. MERI NOTED THAT THERE IS A SECURITY VACUUM IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD AND SUGGESTED THAT NEW SECURITY STRUCTURES ARE NEEDED IN CENTRAL EUROPE. THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT RUSSIA IS STILL TRYING TO DIVIDE EUROPE AND WONDERED WHERE THE FRONTIERS OF THE WEST ARE. ON ESTONIA HE NOTED THE LACK OF A WITHDRAWAL DATE FOR RUSSIAN TROOPS AND ARGUED THAT MOSCOW IS NOT BEING HELPFUL VIS-A-VIS THE RUSSIAN MINORITY WHICH HE FELT IS BASICALLY SATISFIED HERE, DESPITE THE PROBLEMS.

5. TALBOTT NOTED HIS PAST INTEREST AND RELATIONSHIP TO ESTONIA WHICH HE HAD SINGLED OUT AMONG THE BALTIC STATES OVER THE YEARS TO GET TO KNOW BETTER. PICKING UP ON POINTS MADE BY MERI, TALBOTT ARGUED THAT VIS-A-VIS RUSSIA, WE ARE SUPPORTING THE REFORM PROCESS, NOT YELTSIN PER SE. WE THINK IT IS IN THE INTEREST OF ALL IN THE REGION FOR THE PROCESS TO SUCCEED. WHILE IT MIGHT INITIALLY APPEAR THAT WE HAD FOCUSSED SOLELY ON RUSSIA, THAT WAS A REFLECTION OF THE GRAVITY OF THE CRISIS WHEN THE NEW ADMINISTRATION CAME INTO OFFICE.
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IN FACT WE WANT TO WORK WITH ALL. IN RESPONSE, MERI SAID THAT WE ALL WANT TO SEE THE REGENERATION OF HISTORICAL RUSSIA. BUT HE PERSONALLY FELT THAT FURTHER FRAGMENTATION WAS LIKELY, NOTABLY WITH

SIBERIA. AMBASSADOR TALBOTT SAID THAT WE WERE VERY MUCH OPPOSED TO THAT TREND ALTHOUGH WE SUPPORT GREATER REGIONAL AUTONOMY.

6. WHILE AGREEING ON MOST ISSUES, E.G. THE NEED TO SUPPORT REGIONS IN RUSSIA SUCH AS PETERSBURG RATHER THAN FOCUSING EXCESSIVELY ON MOSCOW, PRESIDENT MERI AND AMBASSADOR TALBOTT CLEARLY DISAGREED ON THE ISSUE OF C.I.S. PEACEKEEPING FORCES WHICH HAD BEEN ON THE AGENDA IN BOTH BAKU AND YEREVAN, THE DELEGATION'S STOPS BEFORE TALLINN. TALBOTT ARGUED THAT THE RUSSIANS WILL BE - WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT - PLAYING A ROLE IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS, AND PERHAPS WE CAN GET MORE OF A HANDLE ON IT TO INFLUENCE THEM. MERI AND OTHER ESTONIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS DISAGREED AND, IN ESSENCE, SEE THE ISSUE AS A CYNICAL RUSSIAN BID TO DUPE THE WEST INTO FUNDING AND LEGITIMIZING NINETEENTH CENTURY-STYLE RUSSIAN MILITARY SWASHBUCKLING IN THAT PART OF THE WORLD.

THE RUSSIAN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

7. FOLLOWING THE SESSION WITH THE PRESIDENT, AMBASSADOR TALBOTT MET FOR AN HOUR WITH SIX RUSSIAN POLITICAL FIGURES, THREE FROM TALLINN, THREE FROM THE NORTHEAST. NIKOLAI YUGANTSEV, CHAIRMAN OF THE UNOFFICIAL "RUSSIAN-SPEAKERS' REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY", POINTED OUT THAT THEY ARE STRIVING TO REPRESENT THE INTERESTS AND RIGHTS OF THE RUSSIANS WHO WANT TO STAY IN ESTONIA, BUT STATED THAT THE GOAL OF THE ESTONIAN GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO BE TO GET AS MANY OF THE

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RUSSIANS TO LEAVE AS POSSIBLE. VIKTOR ANDREYEV, VICE-MAYOR OF
TALLINN, DISAGREED, HOWEVER, REMARKING THAT THIS IS NOT A
GOVERNMENT POLICY BUT IS THE POLICY OF CERTAIN ESTONIAN POLITICAL
PARTIES. YUGANTSEV STRESSED THAT ECONOMIC PROBLEMS ARE MORE
IMPORTANT TO RESOLVE THAN POLITICAL PROBLEMS. RUSSIANS IN ESTONIA
WERE NOT RELYING ON ANY ONE COUNTRY, NAMELY RUSSIA, BUT WERE
BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH COUNTRIES TO THE WEST. VLADIMIR
CHUIKIN, HEAD OF NARVA'S CITY COUNCIL, COMPLAINED THAT THE BIGGEST
PROBLEM IS THAT THE ESTONIAN GOVERNMENT DOES NOT HAVE A UNIFIED
PLAN TO DEVELOP THE ECONOMY. HE DESCRIBED SOME OF THE ECONOMIC
DIFFICULTIES AFFECTING RUSSIANS MORE DIRECTLY THAN ESTONIANS,
INCLUDING UNEMPLOYMENT THAT HAS HIT LARGE, RUSSIAN-DOMINATED

INDUSTRIES THE HARDEST, PENSION LAWS THAT COMPENSATE ONLY FOR WORK IN ESTONIA AND HOUSING PRIVATIZATION LAWS THAT FORESEE ISSUING VOUCHERS ONLY FOR YEARS WORKED IN ESTONIA. HE AGREED WITH THE DELEGATION THAT SOME OF THESE PROBLEMS COULD BE SOLVED WITH TIME AND WITH NEGOTIATIONS WITH RUSSIA.

8. IN RESPONSE TO AMBASSADOR TALBOTT'S QUESTION ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, ALEKSEI SEMYONOV, A MEMBER OF THE ASSEMBLY'S PRESIDIUUM STATED THAT IF ONE INTERPRETS INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS STRICTLY, THEN THERE ARE NO HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS.
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HOWEVER, HE EXPLAINED, INTERNATIONALLY ACCEPTED HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS WERE DEVELOPED IN THE CONTEXT OF PEOPLE WHO ARE ALREADY CITIZENS OF A COUNTRY. HE ARGUED THAT THE VERY DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN CITIZENS AND NON-CITIZENS IN ESTONIA WHICH COULD LEAD TO THE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST NON-CITIZENS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. THE ASSEMBLY IS AGAINST THE CREATION OF A MONO-ETHNIC STATE IN ESTONIA. ALL SIX RUSSIANS SAID THAT THEY ARE STUDYING ESTONIAN. FOUR OUT OF SIX SAID THEY ARE NOW ESTONIAN CITIZENS. VITALII MENSHIKOV, MAYOR OF SILLAMAE, REMARKED THAT AN ESTONIAN LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAM SHOULD HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED FOUR YEARS AGO; THAT NO PROGRAM YET EXISTS. YUGANTSEV AGREED WITH THE DELEGATION'S UNDERSTANDING THAT LANGUAGE IS MORE IMPORTANT FOR ESTONIANS THAN BLOOD, BUT SEMYONOV ADDED THAT ALTHOUGH RUSSIANS MAY LEARN ESTONIAN THEY WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AS ESTONIANS BECAUSE THEY DO NOT SHARE THE ESTONIAN "SPIRIT".

9. AMBASSADOR TALBOTT STRESSED U.S. INTEREST IN THE SITUATION OF RUSSIANS IN ESTONIA AND THE SECRETARY'S COMMITMENT TO FOREIGN MINISTER KOZYREV IN FEBRUARY OF 1993 THAT WE ARE CONCERNED THAT THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE RUSSIAN DIASPORA BE RESPECTED. THE RUSSIAN SIDE WARMLY EXPRESSED ITS GRATITUDE FOR THE MEETING AND THE CHANCE TO PRESENT ITS CASE DIRECTLY TO A SENIOR AMERICAN TEAM. ON THE WAY OUT, MENSHIKOV REMARKED TO ERIC EDELMAN THAT THE RUSSIAN COMMUNITY IN ESTONIA FEELS THAT THE AMERICAN EMBASSY IN TALLINN KNOWS MORE ABOUT THE RUSSIANS HERE AND CARES MORE ABOUT THEIR PROBLEMS THAN THE RUSSIAN EMBASSY. AND THEY APPRECIATE THAT CONCERN.

YOUNGER RUSSIANS IN TALLINN

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10. IN THE NEXT SESSION, OVER COFFEE, AMBASSADOR TALBOTT AND HIS TEAM MET WITH SEVERAL YOUNGER, NON-POLITICAL RUSSIANS WHO ARE

MAKING THEIR OWN FUTURES IN INDEPENDENT ESTONIA. IN RESPONSE TO THE DELEGATION'S QUESTION IF RUSSIANS THOUGHT THE ESTONIAN GOVERNMENT'S LONG-TERM PLAN WAS TO GET THEM TO LEAVE, ALEKSANDER ASTROV, A POLITICAL COMMENTATOR FOR THE RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE PROGRAM OF ESTONIAN RADIO NOTED THAT, PARADOXICALLY, ACCORDING TO A RECENT SURVEY, THE ESTONIAN GOVERNMENT IS MORE POPULAR AMONG RUSSIANS HERE THAN AMONG ESTONIANS.

11. MARINA BINDES, AN EDUCATOR AT A PRIVATE BUSINESS COLLEGE IN TALLINN EXPLAINED THAT THIS MAY RESULT FROM RUSSIANS' INNATE CONSERVATIVENESS: THEY WANT TO KEEP PEOPLE IN OFFICE WHO HAVE ALREADY ENRICHED THEMSELVES IN HOPES THAT THEY WILL THEN HELP THE PEOPLE INSTEAD OF A NEW TEAM THAT WILL CONCENTRATE ON ENRICHING THEMSELVES. ASTROV CONCLUDED THAT IT IS BEST TO ASK TWO QUESTIONS WHEN TRYING TO EXPLAIN THE SITUATION OF RUSSIANS IN ESTONIA: ARE THERE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN ESTONIA AND IS ESTONIA THE BEST PLACE FOR RUSSIANS TO LIVE? THE ANSWER TO BOTH OF THOSE QUESTIONS, CONCLUDED ASTROV, IS NO. BUT FOR MOST RUSSIANS, THERE IS NO PLACE ELSE TO GO. NO ONE WANTS THEM IN THE ECONOMIC CHAOS IN RUSSIA AND THE WEST IS NOT WELCOMING THEM. MOST OF THEM ARE GOING ABOUT MAKING THEIR LIVES HERE. ASTROV SAID IT IS AN UNCOMFORTABLE TIME HERE FOR RUSSIANS BECAUSE ESTONIANS ARE RECREATING THEIR CULTURE AND SOCIETY. AND PART OF THAT IS DONE IN OPPOSITION TO THE RUSSIANS.

12. LEONID APANANSKI, A WELL-KNOWN AND PROSPEROUS BUSINESSMAN IN

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TALLINN COMMENTED THAT RUSSIAN BUSINESS IS STRONGER IN ESTONIA THAN
ESTONIAN BUSINESS AND THAT ESTONIANS UNDERSTAND THAT THEY SHOULD
EXPLOIT THEIR GEOGRAPHICAL PROXIMITY TO RUSSIA AND NORMALIZE
ECONOMIC TIES. HE AFFIRMED THAT NATIONALITY/CITIZENSHIP HAD NO
EFFECT ON BUSINESS. IN RESPONSE, AMBASSADOR TALBOTT REITERATED OUR
CONTINUING INTEREST AND CONCERN ABOUT THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE
RUSSIAN COMMUNITY IN ESTONIA.

MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER LAAR

13. AMBASSADOR TALBOTT COVERED SOME OF THE SAME GROUND FROM THE
MERI MEETING, NOTING IN PARTICULAR THE NEED TO HELP REFORMERS IN
RUSSIA. LAAR CONCURRED WHILE EXPRESSING CONSIDERABLE SKEPTICISM
THAT THE REFORM PROCESS WOULD PREVAIL, BUT WE ALL HAVE TO HOPE SO.

14. PICKING UP ON TALBOTT'S COMMENTS ON HIS MEETINGS DURING THE

MORNING WITH VARIOUS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE RUSSIAN COMMUNITY, LAAR NOTED THAT, IN FACT, COMPARED TO FIVE YEARS AGO, ACCORDING TO SURVEY RESEARCH DATA, HOSTILITY BETWEEN RUSSIANS AND ESTONIANS HAS DECLINED. LAAR CONTINUED WITH SOME AMUSEMENT THAT HIS GOVERNMENT
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IS MORE POPULAR AMONG YOUNGER RUSSIANS THAN IT IS AMONG YOUNGER ESTONIANS. THE REAL PROBLEMS FOR RUSSIANS ARE IN CENTRAL ASIA, NOT IN THE BALTICS. MOSCOW'S COMMENTS ON RUSSIANS IN THE BALTICS ARE DESIGNED TO STIR THINGS UP AND THUS ARE ESPECIALLY UNHELPFUL. MOSCOW KEEPS SAYING THINGS WHICH CAN NEVER BE TAKEN BACK.

15. IN REPLY, AMBASSADOR TALBOTT COMPLIMENTED LAAR ON THE ESTONIAN SUCCESS STORY, ECONOMICALLY AND POLITICALLY AND SUMMARIZED OUR POSITIONS CONCERNING RUSSIA, NOTABLY IN THE VANCOUVER COMMUNIQUE, ON THE RUSSIAN DIASPORA. HE ESPECIALLY APPRECIATED THE FACT THAT ESTONIA WELCOMES HUMAN RIGHTS MISSIONS SUCH AS CSCE AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE WHICH IN TURN HAVE FOUND NO EVIDENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN ESTONIA. LAAR REPLIED THAT ESTONIA UNDERSTANDS AND APPRECIATES U.S. POSITIONS. THE PROBLEM IS THAT MOSCOW, AS HAPPENED AFTER VANCOUVER, MISUSES U.S. POSITIONS.

16. AS IN THE MEETING WITH PRESIDENT MERI, THE TWO SIDES DID NOT AGREE ON THE ISSUE OF C.I.S. PEACEKEEPERS. LAAR DID WARM SLIGHTLY, HOWEVER, WHEN TALBOTT SET FORTH THE THEORETICAL EXAMPLE OF A SETTLEMENT IN NAGORNO KARABAKH IN WHICH RUSSIAN TROOPS WOULD BE JOINED BY OTHER INTERNATIONAL FORCES. AS MERI HAD DONE, LAAR MADE IT CLEAR THAT WHATEVER IS DECIDED ABOUT C.I.S. PEACEKEEPERS, THERE IS NO RELEVANCE IN THE BALTICS. TALBOTT AGREED ENTIRELY.

PRESS CONFERENCE

17. AT A BRIEF PRESS OPPORTUNITY WITH PRIME MINISTER LAAR FOLLOWING THE LUNCH, AMBASSADOR TALBOTT REMARKED ON HIS PERSONAL
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INTEREST IN THE COUNTRY AND THE ESTONIAN "SUCCESS STORY" SINCE THE REESTABLISHMENT OF INDEPENDENCE. HE UNDERLINED THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION'S POSITION ON THE NEED FOR PROMPT RUSSIAN TROOP WITHDRAWAL FROM THE BALTICS, WITHOUT LINKAGES TO ANY OTHER ISSUES. ASKED ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS, AMBASSADOR TALBOTT NOTED THAT A NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL DELEGATIONS HAD VISITED ESTONIA IN THAT REGARD, NOTABLY FROM THE CSCE AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND HAD FOUND NO PATTERN OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. WE COULD ASSOCIATE OURSELVES WITH THAT JUDGMENT. IN CONCLUSION HE CONGRATULATED ESTONIA UPON

ITS ACCEPTANCE INTO THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION, AMBASSADOR TALBOTT NOTED THAT THE BALTICS ARE OUTSIDE OF HIS RESPONSIBILITIES BUT HE HAD COME TO TALLINN AS THE LAST STOP ON THE TRIP "SO THAT THE MEMBERS (OF THE DELEGATION) COULD RETURN TO WASHINGTON IN A GOOD MOOD". (THE ISSUE OF ESTONIAN/AMERICAN COL. ALEXANDER EINSELN'S ROLE AS CHIEF OF THE DEFENSE FORCES HERE DID NOT COME UP, EITHER IN THE PRESS CONFERENCE OR IN ANY OF THE MEETINGS.)

18. THE PRIME MINISTER DESCRIBED THE MEETING AS WARM, EFFECTIVE, AND CONSTRUCTIVE. HE SAID THE ESTONIANS HAD BROUGHT SOME OF THEIR FEARS TO THE ATTENTION OF TALBOTT. "WE WERE UNDERSTOOD AND ALSO THE POSITION OF THE UNITED STATES BECAME CLEARER TO US". LAAR ALSO NOTED POSITIVELY AMBASSADOR TALBOTT'S MEETINGS WITH THE RUSSIAN COMMUNITY.

19. THIS MESSAGE WAS PREPARED AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF AMBASSADOR TALBOTT AND HIS DELEGATION. FRASURE

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