

The Deputy Secretary of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

Monday, December 21, 1998

Dear Yuri:

First, let me thank you for all you did to make Leon, Larry and me feel that our trip to Moscow was most worthwhile. A few days later, Igor Sergeyevich and I were seated next to each other at the Bosnia Peace Implementation Conference in Madrid, so we had a bit of a chance, amidst other business, to compare impressions.

On Iraq, I just talked to Tom, who's back from a day in New York, where he had a good talk with Sergei about ways to make the most of our common ground and to manage the difficulties generated by our differences. Madeleine is on a brief holiday in Colorado, but she will be calling Igor Sergeyevich on several subjects, with special emphasis on Cyprus. We need, if possible, to come to terms on the language for a UN resolution, since the one hope of a possible deal may hang in the balance. Tom tried to reach you on this subject earlier today and may try again tomorrow.

As you can imagine, the days since I returned from Moscow and Madrid have been pretty hectic, hence the delay in my getting back to you with some initial reactions to the ideas I heard in Moscow about CFE. What I have to say here is in the same spirit as our conversation in your office: mutual brainstorming. I'm trying to give you some sense of how Craig and my other colleagues are likely to respond if the sort of ideas I heard come up in formal channels.

There are several points in what I heard that, if clearly reflected as a Russian position in Vienna, could give us a chance to move forward early in the new year, when negotiations resume there. I hope I'm correct in inferring that Russia is now prepared to accept the various flexibility-mechanisms proposed by delegations representing NATO member-states – and specifically our levels for Exceptional Temporary Deployments outside of the Flank – *provided* the resulting levels of forces permitted in Central and Eastern Europe (both permanently and temporarily) are within what can be agreed to as an acceptable range. It would be an important step forward for Russia to state this in Vienna.

Mr. Georgiy Mamedov
Deputy Foreign Minister,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Moscow.

But in this regard, I must also underscore what I see as a continuing problem. There still seems to be a desire on your side to create a different set of rules for the new NATO members than those that apply to the rest of the Alliance. That crosses one of our red lines: as such, it won't move us forward. If our negotiators focus on trying to create a new Treaty regulation mandating specified reductions in territorial ceilings from designated countries, we will not make the rapid progress our ministers have agreed is a key priority.

We are more likely to achieve an early positive outcome if we focus on what would result from the commitment of individual countries to freeze their territorial ceilings and to undertake reductions in their holdings.

As for defining what these results should be — i.e., decisions on any future reductions in Central and Eastern Europe and elsewhere — that should remain the prerogative of the individual governments of CFE states parties. They have yet to be heard from definitively. As I pointed out in my last letter to you on this subject, their readiness to commit to real reductions will be influenced by evidence of comparable restraint from other states parties, specifically those on their borders and Russia's restraint with regard to Kaliningrad — as well as by the current sizes of their militaries. A "one size fits all" reduction for all countries of the region is unlikely to work.

On the flank, I was encouraged to hear that Russia will continue its discussions with Turkey. It's equally important to do so with Norway and the other concerned parties in this region. It would be an important step if you accepted the principles put forth by Turkey and Norway for operation of future Flank restraints under an adapted Treaty. But other parties will be reluctant, to say the least, to agree to new Flank numbers unless your negotiators can assure them that future Flank obligations will be not only legally-binding but durable.

So much for the prose in what I heard in Moscow. Now for the arithmetic. I've got to tell you that the numbers suggested diminish my hopes of a breakthrough. I had thought we were further along in the process of hammering out a broadly acceptable solution than those numbers suggest.

For example, when our experts met in Brussels last month after the latest PJC experts session on CFE, your representatives indicated that Russia would seek, among two options, 2000 active ACVs for the "new" flank geography within Russian territory. We also understood that, presuming a mutually satisfactory solution to the Capital Repair Facilities question, you would not seek an increase in current permitted levels of tanks and artillery. That ACV figure of 2000 would represent a significant increase over the 580 active ACVs currently allowed Russia. I need hardly belabor the obvious point that the even higher figures I heard in Moscow would be even harder to sell.

Finally, let me echo a point that we've discussed before, and that Tom Pickering made with Igor Sergeevich in Oslo. It concerns "refraining from mutual accusations." You bet! Our task is hard enough, given the complexity of the negotiations, without overheated rhetoric or attempts to set separate deadlines for specific issues. We're committed, as we agreed in Oslo, to pushing for progress in the first months of next year. But our ultimate goal remains an adapted Treaty, and we need to conduct ourselves, and our negotiations, in a way that does not jeopardize that larger objective in the event our best efforts in the coming months are not immediately successful. The U.S. government has tried to maintain a positive approach – both in the actual negotiations and in our characterization of them. We've tried to strike a balance between patience and persistence. We'll continue to do that. It will not help if we have to reply to rhetorical statements, not to mention outright warnings, that seem to call into question the legitimacy of the Treaty and full compliance with its obligations.

In conclusion, let me assure you that, since my return, I've been in close touch with Madeleine and Sandy about the priority we need to give CFE during the months ahead. As I told Igor Sergeevich in Madrid, I also had a very focused conversation with Javier on this subject. You need have no doubt that we're well aware of the importance, even the urgency, of this issue — not just from your standpoint but from ours as well.

I've also been working with colleagues on other, related issues, including the Strategic Concept, with an eye to making developments in '99 as favorable as possible in their implications for U.S.-Russian — and NATO-Russian — relations.

Let's continue to stay in the closest possible touch on CFE and all the other issues on our common plate.

Best regards,



Strobe Talbott

P.S. - If we are not in touch before you go on holiday, I'll have this occasion to wish you a very restful time with your family — & of course, a Happy New Year.