

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR on February 23, 1991 (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR
Interpreter: Demitry Zarechnak
Notetaker: Condoleezza Rice, NSC Staff

DATE, TIME: February 23, 1991, 11:15 - 11:43am
AND PLACE: Camp David, Maryland

The President: Hello, Mikhail, how are you? (U)

President Gorbachev: Greetings. (U)

The President: Greetings. (U)

President Gorbachev: Fine, George. We have a holiday today. We are waiting for congratulations from the chief of the U.S. armed forces to the chief of the Soviet forces for Red Army Day. (U)

The President: I hope this is in train. Are our greetings on the way? (U)

President Gorbachev: Well, we began the celebration yesterday of the 73rd anniversary of the Soviet army -- but the real day is today. People here -- some of my assistants were on the front in World War II. Yakovlev and Chernayev were on the front in the trenches in World War II. They want this working day to end so that they can begin to celebrate. (U)

The President: Please convey my personal congratulations as the Commander in Chief of the American armed forces. (U)

What is the latest in the Middle East? (U)

President Gorbachev: This is precisely what I want to talk about. To continue yesterday's discussion - after our talk yesterday, something has happened that changed the situation. In Baghdad, an official statement has been issued that agrees to full and unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait as specified in the U.N. Resolution and that it will happen from Kuwait City within four days. That is to say we have a white flag from Saddam Hussein. (S)

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Now it is evening here in Moscow. In the afternoon Tariq Aziz had a press conference here in Moscow and set forth that acceptance. Yesterday, after we talked, I gave the suggestions and thoughts from you that were discussed on the phone to Aziz and also my own view. I think that our very firm position and your severe demands have made possible that statement of acceptance. And now we have a new situation that is new for both of us. And I believe that we must weigh carefully the entire situation and discuss what we must decide to do next. (S)

I understand the meaning of your demands that have their own logic. Let me say that today I talked to the leaders of a number of countries and many of them said that there are no differences in the two sets of demands that are insurmountable. To put it briefly, the fact that we have been together from beginning to end has been of decisive importance in making sure that this new situation has come about. Let me say something else, without what the U.S. has done, there would not have been this kind of change in the Iraqi position. And I asked Mr. Ignatenko, my Press Secretary to communicate that particular thought to the world press. He has already done that in a press conference. (S)

Let me now complete my thoughts and then I want to listen to you. After we talked yesterday, I have been thinking what should we do now? And how should we act in order to make certain that there are no doubts about our ability further to cooperate? By the way, this is something that I felt in my discussions with other leaders. They all want the same thing. President Mubarak said very frankly and straightforwardly --- "to me the most important thing is that the U.S. President and the Soviet Union continue to stand together." (S)

Based on that -- I want to propose the following: That at this new stage, we together, the U.S. and Soviet Union, cooperate in the framework of the U.N. Security Council and find a way that would incorporate all the elements of the ideas that we both put forward in a joint resolution. I believe that it is this that would make it possible for our two countries to continue to work together and to attain the desired goal -- the desired result. This is all I wanted to say at this point because we had a wide-ranging philosophical discussion yesterday. (S)

The President: Thank you sir. Jim Baker had a good long talk with Bessmertnykh late last night and for you was this morning. I don't believe that Saddam has ever believed me or how strongly the U.S. feels. Yesterday while you were trying to work all this out -- their spokesman went out and called me a liar about the burning up those oil wells. And once again there have been a bunch more oil wells set on fire overnight. They are continuing to use a scorched earth policy and stalling and this has made a profound impact on me and on other coalition partners. (S)

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And they want to negotiate back from an existing United Nations mandate. So we put down a time when they could demonstrate good-faith. We are in a difficult position -- I can't be seen to be saying something and then not be sincere. I can't say you must move out by noon and -- with no movement and continued destruction of the oil fields -- do nothing. Particularly, when there are still conditions -- you have worked hard -- but there are still conditions. And we too have had extensive consultations -- before you and I talked -- and there is a solid view that he is stalling particularly as it relates to damages and he just wants to do it in a different way. (S)

I do not believe there can be any flexibility in what we can do at this point, even though I know that they are talking in informal conversations in the U.N. Security Council. The best thing, I agree, is for us to be together. I think I have tried, you have tried and Jim and Bessmertnykh have tried. I agree with the premise. You see, we think our position is the United Nations position. So I would again appeal -- with respect for your fantastic efforts -- that you support the position of the U.N. -- unconditional withdrawal -- absolutely without conditions. They say its unconditional and they have dropped some conditions -- thanks to your intervention -- but there are still conditions. Our countries, those involved, feel that now is the time to come to the full U.N. position -- already enshrined in the U.N. resolutions. (S)

Jim tried to make it clear to Bessmertnykh. We cannot put anything on hold -- I have been out there and others have strongly supported that position. I can understand that Iraq doesn't want to accept the conditions but I can't wait. I don't think we should give the Iraqis any other choice but the instant acceptance of these conditions immediately. (S)

That is where we are and I think the difference we have is that you think they have agreed to unconditional withdrawal and we and others with us do not agree. Let's not let this divide the U.S. and the Soviet Union. There are things far bigger than this conflagration which is going to be over very soon. (S)

President Gorbachev: George, let's keep cool. Although, of course, all of us are human beings, I think both of us understand that what we need is not Saddam Hussein -- his fate has been determined. Our concern is to take advantage of the opportunity before us in order to obtain the goal we set together within the framework together in the U.N. Security Council and also to prevent a tragic phase in the further development of the conflict. (S)

Saddam Hussein wants to stall but we are not simpletons. Without wasting time, within 24-48 hours we should raise this in the U.N. Security Council and have a very tough discussion and consider this there. I would accept your idea that within this general

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understanding we have between us -- Baker and Bessmertnykh should work out the details and we would be able to get it done. I want in particular to be understood by you that what I am saying are the words of a friend in the spirit of cooperation. And I fully share what you have just said that there will be many questions to work out. So, George, let me shake your hand and let me say good-bye in a spirit of full understanding. (S)

The President: Mikhail, I appreciate that spirit but I don't want to leave a false impression that there is any more time. Of course I will ask Jim to talk about this but I do not want you to feel that there is any inclination for the U.S. and the coalition to delay. I will talk to Jim about he and Bessmertnykh. You have mentioned the human life aspect about which we talked yesterday and I agree. But I do think this man is stalling and what he is doing to the oil wells in Kuwait and the people there argues against any reasonableness on his part. I don't want to mislead you. I don't feel inclined to wait. I will talk to Jim but don't want to leave the impression that I can delay. We will see what we can do but unless there is something in the next few minutes that he does what has been demanded of him by the coalition under the U.N. mandate and resolutions. (S)

I will talk to Jim. But thank you very much. (U)

President Gorbachev: Good. I understand what you have just said but I think with all we have been through -- one or two days may not be decisive in one sense but in another they could be very decisive and we can do what is right. (S)

The President: Thanks. (U)

President Gorbachev: Thanks. (U)