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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Chancellor Helmut Kohl  
of Germany (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
Chancellor Helmut Kohl  
Notetaker: Nicholas Burns,  
NSC Staff

DATE, TIME July 17, 1990, 8:48-9:17 a.m.  
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

Chancellor Kohl: Hello. (U)

The President: Helmut, congratulations to you. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Thank you very much. I wanted to call you immediately late last night. Do you have time to discuss my trip for a few minutes? (Ø)

The President: Yes, I do. I am very anxious to hear what happened over there. (Ø)

Chancellor Kohl: George, first of all, Gorbachev is in excellent shape. He has managed to get through the hard work at the party congress. I think his success there gave him a push. The situation is also extraordinarily difficult for him. Legally speaking, he has tremendous powers and some of his opponents blamed him for this at the Party congress. (Ø)

The President: Helmut, the translation is fading out. Perhaps your interpreter could get closer to the phone. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Perhaps we should have had a test call. (U)

The President: I can hear her loud and clear now. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: George, our interpreter is a charming lady, more charming than myself. (U)

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The President: I'm glad you haven't changed, Helmut. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Gorbachev is aware of his special situation and of his responsibilities. And he is aware he has to act quickly, to get through pluralism, to change society, and to get through the necessary legislation by the end of this year. And I told him to be aware that there would be no chance to receive Western aid if he doesn't get these reforms through. He said he understood this, and I also told him he can't expect to continue beyond the DM five billion credit given by us without reforms. I also think the people surrounding him are aware of this. (§)

My impression is that we cannot exclude a change in his staff. (§)

The President: Oh, really. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: I'm speaking about his economic people, not his foreign policy advisors. But he is dissatisfied with his economic people and some of the advice he has been getting. In my presence he told Ryzhkov that they had to get going by September and to use the governmental apparatus to get the party to withdraw from the day-to-day running of the economy (translator faded out). He said he would make greater use of the powers of his state office. (§)

One aspect that was interesting to me was -- and we also discussed this extensively -- to see his determination to pursue the modernization of his country. (§)

He said something I had never heard before. He told me his grandfather was tortured and imprisoned under Stalin. His wife said her grandfather was liquidated under Stalin--remarkable. (§)

He was very happy to talk about President Bush. He mentioned you in warm and friendly terms. (§)

We established excellent contacts this time, after his visit to Bonn last year. I do believe the situation has changed. (§)

I also told him about problems with the U.S. on Cuba (translator faded out). (§)

The President: Helmut, could you please repeat what you said on Cuba. I couldn't catch it. (§)

Chancellor Kohl: I indicated these questions had to be settled. He said we would have to wait and see. I told him if he wants to improve relations with the U.S., he would have to change his policy on Cuba. He didn't shirk the issue but he didn't say he would do something soon. I think he realizes that Cuba is important for the U.S. and for George Bush and that there is a connection to U.S. assistance. (S)

The President: Yes. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: We talked about the London Summit and Gorbachev acknowledged the importance of the Declaration. He wants to see Vienna II follow immediately after Vienna I. As for Central and Eastern Europe, he seems to be preoccupied with the USSR and seems to have little interest in the situation of some of his colleagues. He has a fatalistic attitude about Romania. On Poland, one thing is obvious--he doesn't want to see the Poles cause problems between the two Germanys. He spoke about this when we were with Shevardnadze. Our discussion was not different than the U.S. position that the border issue must be clearly resolved but that no further difficulties should arise beyond this issue. (S)

On German issues, we had a one-on-one. After many hours, we made clear progress. The first point in his position was that he recognized there would be German elections by the end of the year. He also said that German sovereignty should be returned completely and unequivocally. I used your formula from Camp David that a sovereign country, under the CSCE, can decide for itself its alliances. And I explained that the Germans would vote unequivocally for NATO, including articles five and six. I told him he had to exert strong pressure on his staff on this issue. He took that position as obvious. (S)

We then discussed the treaty between the unified Germany and the USSR on troops. He accepted, although his staff had a different schedule, a period of three to four years. This was agreed between us. We also agreed that pending the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the territory of the GDR, no NATO troops would be stationed there, although German troops not belonging to NATO could be there. After the withdrawal of Soviet troops in three to four years, only German NATO troops could be stationed there. (S)

Then I said, and this surprised him because we hadn't discussed it before, that I intended to propose to the U.S. and the U.K. a new basis for relations between us in treaties that would terminate four power rights, and maintain their troops in Berlin until the withdrawal of Soviet troops. I said this would be important for psychological reasons, and very helpful to the German people. (S)

On troop ceilings, I told him clearly that Soviet figures were unacceptable, and that on the basis of our tradition of twelve-month conscription, we would have to have 370,000 troops. (S)

On economics, we now have to negotiate issues pending from the treaties between the USSR and the GDR. This is a very important issue, but we have not yet reached any agreement. (S)

One final point, I told him it was in our interest, because we have linked this and have no intention of giving up our NATO membership, to develop a reasonable relationship with the USSR over the long-run. We intend to conclude a comprehensive treaty governing all aspects of our relations, but this can only be done after unification. (S)

One other interesting thing: we talked about German-U.S. relations in our one-on-one. I told him this relationship was of great importance. And I told him that if the Soviets try to undermine it, this would affect German relations with the USSR. His reply will be of interest to you. He said they had learned a lesson that it was wrong to try to make the U.S. withdraw from Europe, and that they hadn't succeeded in this in the past. I touched upon this repeatedly, and I think he was serious in his reply. We talked about improving our economic relationship, but he knows good relations will prosper only if the U.S.-German relationship continues. (S)

Finally, his impression on me is a man who knows himself well, and who has a sense of self-irony. He has burned all his bridges behind him. He can't go back, and he must be successful. (S)

The reaction of the population in Stavropol--his turf-- was good. The people were not ordered to be there, but they applauded him. These simple people seem to be aware of the need to open up the USSR. (S)

We visited that region where there were many battles in World War Two. We met veterans with decorations on their lapels. But the general mood was toward compromise. (S)

A final point. I said in the press conference that, without our friends, we could not have experienced this day--that is the U.S. and you, Mr. President, in your performance in the past few months. (S)

Before you called today, I was speaking to a friend. I said we must bear in mind that the first Soviet soldiers reached the border of the German Reich in November 1944, and that Soviet troops could finally withdraw from Germany by November 1994, exactly fifty years, a half century, after they first came. This gives you an idea of our feelings. (S)

The President: That was very moving, Helmut. Thanks for the report. I may get back to you with some questions. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: Of course. (U)

The President: The only question I have now is the question of parallel withdrawal of forces. I hope there won't be an effort to equate U.S. forces in Europe and Soviet forces which could cause our troops to be pulled out at the same time. That would be bad for NATO. This question concerns me and the timeframe could allow the Soviets to build public opinion to get our forces out. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: George, this issue didn't play any part whatsoever, nor did Gorbachev mention it. I mentioned it and said I took for granted that U.S. forces would remain in Germany. He didn't refute this. (S)

The President: Congratulations. We welcome your leadership and the outcome. We are proud of you. It was a stimulating performance which we watched with great interest. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: Give my love to Barbara. (U)

The President: The same to Hannelore. Thanks for the full report. I will talk to Gorbachev about the Houston Summit to give a formal Chairman's report. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: Yes, he told me about the call. Good, I told him I would call you. Give him my best regards. (U)

The President: Good-bye and thank you. (U)

-- End of Conversation --