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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: The President's Meeting with President Gorbachev of the Soviet Union

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

Mikhail Gorbachev, President
Anatoliy Chernyayev, Aide to CPSU General Secretary

DATE, TIME September 9, 1990, 1000 - 1245
AND PLACE: Helsinki, Finland

The President: Good to see you again.

President Gorbachev: Despite the fact that we are all here through difficult circumstances, I am glad to see you.

The President: I think that our agreement at Camp David for this kind of meeting is good and public opinion is playing this meeting well.

President Gorbachev: I have said at the airport that we are in constant touch but sometimes personal contact is necessary.

The President: I agree. I don't know how you want to proceed. I think it is wonderful signal to the world that the US and the Soviet Union have been proceeding in concert on the Gulf. Do you want to start -- or I would be happy to proceed.

President Gorbachev: I accept your proposal to proceed. See how easy I am.

The President: So far we have had good cooperation. I know it is not easy for you because of your long standing relations with Iraq. But I think there is an opportunity to have develop out of this tragedy a new world order. But the bottom line for a new world order must be that Saddam Hussein cannot be allowed to profit from his aggression. I am not sure he yet knows that the

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US is determined to prevail. I hope you will get word to him that we can't afford to fail in implementing the resolutions of the UN. We have a strategy in place that has a good chance of working. Sanctions are our preferred way of inducing him to withdraw and allow the return of Kuwait's leaders. I do not want this to escalate and I do not want to use force. I know you agree. But if he does not withdraw, he must know the status quo is unacceptable. He is dismantling Kuwait right now. In this the Congress and our people will support me. What he is doing to innocent civilians--perhaps not Soviet--is unconscionable. You should tell him I will not deviate because of people forced to stay in target installations. That is Nuremburg Trial material. I would like to feel you and I can discuss this matter so fully that if in the end 23 countries are forced to move on to other measures that you would support them. That may be difficult for you but I would hope that you could do that. I want to tell you I am worried about our people in Kuwait too. But let me make just a couple more observations. The press asked me if I would ask you to send forces. I said I had no such plans, but I tell you if you so decide, I have no problem with that. Let me tell you, I have no plans to leave US forces in the Gulf. I don't want a military presence in the Gulf. There is no plan direct or indirect to keep our forces there. Any residual security presence to keep Saddam Hussein under control should be multilateral. Our people wouldn't support huge permanent presence. Lets get the difficult issues out on the table. US people wonder about Soviet advisors in Iraq. You would benefit hugely in the US by taking those advisors out. I'm getting all my cards on the table, one more point. US tradition is to say the Soviets have no role to play in the Middle East. The Soviet Union obviously disagreed with that. I think Saddam Hussein would have a clear victory if he could mix in the Arab-Israel issue to his aggression. I assure you this traditional US policy has changed. The world order I see coming out of this is US and Soviet cooperation to solve not only this but other problems in the Middle East. And --I promise this is my last point--

President Gorbachev: Good, this is my last piece of paper.
(Laughter)

The President: The closer we can be together today, the closer the new world order, the closer the US-Soviet relationship, the closer to a solution to the Gulf crisis. I want to work with you as equal partners in dealing with this. I want to go to the American people tomorrow night to close the book on the Cold War and offer them the vision of this new world order in which we will cooperate. [cartoon showing the President and President Gorbachev smashing the Cold War]

President Gorbachev: I've written my notes over my typed notes. Here is a text of Saddam Hussein's appeal to both of us. He believes he is guided by Allah and the US by the devil. I value very much the trust I feel in your initial remarks. Indeed, I think this crisis is a test of the process we are going through in world affairs and of a new US-Soviet Union relationship. Without forgetting the scale of this conflict, I am thinking if we can't cope with this conflict, a new order can't come in. It may be that this crisis will be the stone on which we will stumble. Question is can we act and think in a new way. If not, the results are serious -- without the meeting in Malta, without the new relationship, Eastern Europe and German unification could have been much worse. It could have turned into a horrible mess. We now find ourselves with a new problem no less difficult. Let me say on Eastern Europe and Germany the main burden was on us. We had to make a major effort to end old thinking, to step over the old order and recognize new realities. I continue to explain to the Soviet people what is happening in the world and what the new thinking is all about. It is not easy for us -- some analysts in the West make things more difficult for us in the way they put things. But the bulk of Soviet people have accepted the new way of thinking. In the Gulf, the US is in a more difficult position. I understand that, perhaps more than our people, I understand something about US. Your people expect you to act decisively and win. Both our peoples expect quick results. So I understand the situation you face. But let me emphasize that in this new world US-Soviet Union cooperation is essential. We see your difficulty and let me say we sympathize and respect your thinking. This is important. That is, zero-sum thinking is over. I've said to Dole that what we are doing in the Soviet Union is for us but also good for the US, because for a new world the US needs a strong confident Soviet Union. You should not doubt our position is firm. We have condemned Iraqi aggression and supported the UN. We are as one here. But it was difficult for us at first because you first decided to send forces and then told us. That made it difficult. Perhaps it happened that way because this process is new.

The President: I can accept that as constructive criticism. We weren't trying to do it behind your back, but I can accept I should have called you and told you I was going to do it.

President Gorbachev: But later on, we were able to act shoulder to shoulder to mobilize the world community and that's a big achievement. That has given very different appearance to the forces and that is good. But there must be some kind of arrangements to manage this new order. But you have taken the -- main burden of dealing with Iraqi aggression. Here is the core of my thinking. The danger to Saudi Arabia is passed. The world community has condemned Iraq aggression. Structure of world oil

has been protected. These are strategic goals which have been achieved. Things are now functioning normally but problem of Kuwait hasn't been solved. It must be solved. We--like you-- have given a lot of thought to this. From your comments I get three main points:

1. Kuwait problem must be solved.
2. You want US forces withdrawn.
3. You prefer non-military solution.

I think we all -- especially you -- are under great pressure to be decisive. I agree, but if that means military action -- therein lies danger. We have put big intelligence effort -- we decided military option unacceptable and should be to you as well. But that is insufficient. Let me explain. If Iraq doesn't attack Saudi Arabia or Israel, the US would be the initiator of war, if Iraq doesn't attack further.

The President: You mean if hostilities are launched without provocation?

President Gorbachev: Yes. His main forces -- as Akromeyev has shown me -- are not facing Saudi Arabia. If you must defeat his main forces -- in Iraq -- that's an enormous conflict, like Afghanistan and Vietnam. People in both our countries would begin to say President has gotten entangled in a mess, since oil is flowing -- there should have been a better way. Many casualties. If the region ceases to function the economic consequences could be enormous. Saudi oil income is greater than before the crisis, though it is having trouble finding dollars for your troops. But if the region is destroyed, we would be in hell, all of us. And also, Saddam Hussein has some sympathy in the Arab world. Man in the street thinks he is a man not afraid of US. If the region is destroyed, the heartland of Arab world, they will turn against you. Also we, you and the Europeans have mentality different from Muslims. We can't appear to desecrate their shrines without terrible results. As an aside, it is good that both you and us have recognized Islam fundamentalism is a problem which must be dealt with sensitively.

The President: You assume Saddam Hussein has Arab world with him. He is trying, but I think, with one-half Arab world in Egypt, he is failing in those attempts.

President Gorbachev: I think it is not quite so. Recent meetings have shown criticism of Saddam Hussein in Arab meetings have lessened. In Govts, yes, but in public opinion it is less so. Mubarak and Assad could find themselves in difficult positions. Great forces could be set in motion from beneath. Let me be frank. Even in West there is some weariness. If

things get difficult, even they may want to distance themselves. Now there is unity in Security Council but it could be broken. China, for example, won't join us. US will greatly suffer if things go that way -- so for all these reasons we must look for a different way. Of course, Saddam Hussein will not just leave Kuwait. In our recent contacts, all have spoken of necessity for strict observance of embargo. Situation in Iraq changing too, despite Saddam Hussein comments. He will have to take more sober look at situation. Our experts -- we have many on Iraq -- say that only one option accepts the use of force; that is, if he attacks Saudi Arabia or Jordan.

The President: Suppose he lobs SCUD into Israel.

President Gorbachev: That would be very difficult situation. I don't think he will do that. But we can't leave the situation as is. Primakov knows Saddam Hussein personally. All believe backing Saddam Hussein into a corner is wrong. He must be allowed to save face. Morally it is complex situation. So what is possible as an option? We have been thinking about mutually interconnected measures. First, Iraq withdraws and frees foreign citizens, and at same time all (anti-Iraq governments with force contributions) say to UNSC that they would not attack Iraq. If things go by these two declarations, withdrawal would take place under UN, with peacekeeping force to replace Iraqi troops. US could begin, symbolically, (i.e., only a small number) to reduce its forces in Saudi Arabia, to be replaced by Arab forces -- just as Iraqi forces withdraw from Kuwait. UN would suspend enforcement resolutions and when Iraqi forces withdrawn would cancel them. The essence of this plan is that if Saddam Hussein rejects it he will unmask himself and prevent rising sympathy for him in Arab world. There is this problem. Saddam Hussein wants to link all the Middle East problems -- Gulf, Israel, Lebanon. He is gaining in this effort; exploiting this he appears as champion of Arab against Israel. We should try to turn the tables on him and play this card ourselves. There was support for an international conference which you made, attended by all Arab states. This would make it possible to discuss, first the problem of Kuwait, then Israel and Lebanon and finally a security system for the region. In some European capitals there is interest in this kind of solution. If Israel would agree to such a conference as a second stage we would rapidly establish diplomatic relations with them. Of course Saddam Hussein could reject this plan. But since this plan also includes the Palestinian issue, he would be rejecting the West Bank issue and unmask himself as being just selfish, not as an Arab protector. If this plan is adopted or sanctions enforced, Saddam Hussein source for maneuver would be constricted. We have discussed the issue of a blockade -- that impossible to maintain without the threat of force. That a necessary problem but we think the

blockade can be made more strict. So far Saddam Hussein has exploited claim US and Soviet Union trying to starve Iraq women and children, etc., and this getting more sympathy in Arab world. In this plan, we could provide for discussions between, Kuwait and Iraq -- some kind of elections and perhaps payment. This would prevent him from exploiting the present situation. Saddam Hussein may reject this plan. But if something like this is proposed, it would show us in joint action, giving peace a chance and prevent him from taking advantage of it. Wouldn't have to be this precise plan. Let me say the Soviet advisors are not military specialists. They are being reduced from 193 to 150. These specialists are there under contract.

The President: We had people -- like Bechtel -- there under contract, but under UN resolutions we consider those contracts void.

President Gorbachev: We are reducing the number, and by scaling down contracts we will have loss of \$1.2 billion. To conclude, let me say we are acting in pursuit of our joint objectives and on basis of the joint decision we have taken together. We are completely with you on this. You have made a number of interesting points in your remarks and we will be responding to them. I agree with you we should go out of these talks showing our joint commitment to a common cause and our determination to resolve this situation. In his speech, Saddam Hussein says he hasn't attacked either of our countries and it was British colonialists who separated Kuwait from Iraq. He also says Panama was invaded without the UN taking action. Why are you ganging up on us. (Reads more of the speech.)

The President: Bullshit. He also says I am pork-eater. He's right. A couple of comments. I think Saddam Hussein would jump at your plan and I think the world would take it as a big defeat for the world. He is trying to link his actions to the intractable problem of Arabs-Israelis and he can't use this to cover his own aggression. There is one place I differ with your experts. I don't think he stands as a symbol of Arab vs infidel. His aggression is obvious and he hasn't been able to coopt Assad, Mubarak or even a majority of the Arab league. These people tell me he doesn't speak for the Arab World. I don't think he is 20 feet tall. Any agreement on a plan which left Kuwait issue open would be a major defeat for the collective action which has gotten us so far.

President Gorbachev: But -- central point is he must leave Kuwait. But we think he would reject it.

The President: Why. He gets what he wants. Still has nuclear program and can return to aggression as soon as US leaves.

President Gorbachev: No. Arab peacekeeping, he leaves Kuwait, recognizes Kuwaiti leaders.

The President: Those are positives. The Kuwaiti leaders are preserved, in your plans?

President Gorbachev: It reestablishes Kuwaiti regime. Further is up to Kuwaiti people.

The President: But the leadership is restored?

President Gorbachev: Yes.

The President: Then maybe he wouldn't reject. We'd love to find a peaceful solution.

President Gorbachev: Let us try to tinker with some such plans. It suggested by some Arabs like Maghreb and if we can get something are better off. Nothing happening now and military action would appear as aggression.

The President: He is now dismantling Kuwait.

President Gorbachev: I think this is why we should act quickly. Force would destroy what we have achieved. If current situation drags on without steps we will have lost initiative. Here we could say we are acting in responsible way by suggesting ways to solve the problem. (Discussion on the point about the return of Kuwaiti regime.)

President Gorbachev: Kuwaiti rulers would return and begin negotiations. That's why he will reject the plan.

The President: Let's assume he rejects the plan. What next?

President Gorbachev: Then we would continue the political and economic pressure but he couldn't appear as the leader of the Arabs. He would then be isolated.

The President: If he accepts the plan, he withdraws from Kuwait, the leaders return and he gets a conference on Israel and US troops out of Saudi Arabia.

President Gorbachev: US troops would all leave only after international guarantees are in place.

The President: I have one more worry. Whatever comes out of our meetings can't be a US-Soviet Union plan. That would look like condominium of just the two of us trying to find a solution. But

the idea is interesting and we must do some thinking. One more worry. He is corruptible and likely to do something -- like terrorist act. He could guarantee US response if he determined to do so. My Arab friends say he is vicious, unpredictable and I am worried he might do something.

President Gorbachev: We can't act as if US-Soviet Union solving the problem. But if we can do nothing why do we meet.

The President: I agree.

President Gorbachev: If we devise some idea we both like we can figure out how to get it introduced.

The President: I agree. I just wanted to point out we must be sensitive to this point. But I totally agree with what you said and the advantages if we can get together on something.

President Gorbachev: I think today we could say we had wide ranging discussion and that we think it possible to find solution which would prevent even worse developments.

The President: I agree except we should say "look for." I not sure we can find such a plan.

President Gorbachev: Now, what kind of a man he is. Your characterization of Saddam Hussein is identical to ours. But these personality characteristics will be most realized if he is backed into a corner. If we give him some window to climb out we have a chance. If he sees such a chance he won't act in a provocative manner. Instead he will seize that chance, so we could show two sides of some coin -- show our joint action and decisiveness in this crisis but leave public opinion with realization we are trying to find a way out without military action, casualties, etc.

The President: I would like to go the extra mile for peace but we must not undermine the UN collective action. For example, some Americans propose elections in Kuwait. If we have that as a condition we diminish the collective decision we have already taken. If Kuwaiti people subsequently decide something different, that is something else. This aggression so clear that if he is rewarded it will set a terrible precedent for the future. He cannot be allowed to proceed.

President Gorbachev: But if he gets nothing at all, if he is backed into a corner, it will be more costly for us all. We need to give him some daylight. Let's give the impression that he not on his knees -- though he would be because he would not succeed.

The President: If we had offered Hitler way out, would it have succeeded?

President Gorbachev: Not the same situation.

The President: Only in personality.

President Gorbachev: We have to choose. We don't have many options. I believe that you who have achieved so much here, avoid a costly conflict with possible destruction of oil, that would be tremendous victory. We could throw our weight around, but we must choose. If we throw him a carrot, we will win, establish the role of international law (UN), our cooperation and avoid serious conflict.

The President: I agree completely. We must though have a way in which does not incite future aggression. Much of what you propose does that. Only problem is if Israel part appears like a victory for aggression.

President Gorbachev: No. This is not a carrot. The carrot is engaging him in a political process. This is a carrot. We would recognize him as a partner. If we don't include Israel, he could say he proposed a comprehensive plan and we rejected it. If we propose it and he rejects it, he will unmask himself. If he accepts, we will solve the Gulf problem, take steps to resolve Arab-Israel issue and Soviet Union will immediately recognize Israel.

The President: There is already a conference in being on Kuwait -- the UNSC, which has behaved magnificently.

President Gorbachev: This too would be in the UN format. Participation would include UNSC and the Arabs -- very strong participation. If he rejects he isolates himself and we gain time. He loses in the eyes of the world -- looks like a maniac with whom the world can't deal. Of course, before we discuss plan with others we could probe him -- don't present plan but probe to see what leverage exists.

The President: That could be useful in any course. Mubarak will tell you Saddam can't withdraw.

President Gorbachev: Assad will say the same.

The President: He says if he withdraws he is finished. Where we may differ is I don't think we need further evidence of unreasonableness. You assume he will turn it down and prove unreasonableness.

President Gorbachev: But if he accepts, the process would begin.

The President: You see the withdrawals being completed and then a conference on Middle East, right?

President Gorbachev: There will be agreement on Conference and format and based on that the process will begin. We tie this in at initial stage -- release civilians and announce withdrawal and US announces it will not attack Iraq. US force withdrawal would be token, while Iraqi withdrawal takes place complete with replacement by Arab forces. US withdrawal would take place only when security situation is in place.

The President: We will look at this carefully. Brent have I left anything out.

Brent Scowcroft: If he rejects the plan can we just continue a stalemate indefinitely.

President Gorbachev: We would have shifted opinion and internal processes I think would remove him.

The President: What about claims we starving women and children.

President Gorbachev: We must look at that and medicine.

The President: But it should be done under international processes so he couldn't profit by it. How we doing on time for this meeting.

President Gorbachev: Badly.

The President: One unrelated point. Kohl asked me to come to the unification ceremony on October 3. That is very tough for me. Elections coming and I already cancelled a trip to Latin America. What is your view on the importance of the event? If I don't go is that a problem for you?

President Gorbachev: No, I don't think so. I too am extremely busy. I'm in domestic battle in moving to market economy and union treaty. Difficult for me to get there. I also told Kohl I recognize the importance and would consult with you.

The President: Unless you or Kohl makes really strong appeal I will tell him I cannot attend.

President Gorbachev: If you can't go, I won't.

The President: Our position on this should not be different. Are you going to Children's Conference?

President Gorbachev: No. We must think about your visit to the Soviet Union. On START and CFE I think we can conclude OK. We might say to press we have problems but we feel we can have positive outcome by end of year.

The President: I would like to tell Baker to get the bureaucrats moving.

President Gorbachev: You use the term "bureaucrats." I say "experts."

The President: I suspect we both mean the same thing.