

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Prime Minister Antall
of Hungary (U)

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

Jozsef Antall, Prime Minister
Gyula Kodolanyi, Adviser to the Prime
Minister
Interpreter

DATE, TIME October 18, 1990, 10:45 - 11:40 a.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: I will give you an opportunity to say anything in private here, and then we will join the others. We can also talk before dinner. Let me welcome you again to the White House. (U)

Prime Minister Antall: I would like to start by saying that this year we are celebrating the anniversary of our four greatest kings. As a commemoration I have a gift of a couple of coins, but the security people took them. (Patty brings in coins.) This King Matyas, who ruled from 1458 to 1490, was a great patron of the Hungarian nation. (U)

Then there is the sad case from the previous regime of Conrad. Here is a complete list of documents that Conrad had. Our soldiers talked to your people about them, and they know all the details. (S)

The President: That is very helpful. Damage control may still be possible. I can't tell you how I appreciate this gesture. (S)

Prime Minister Antall: An officer in Hungarian intelligence said, if there is one positive feature of the Conrad case, these documents proved that NATO did not plan an attack. This must have given Gorbachev ammunition against the Soviet hawks. Quite recently there was a heated debate in the Soviet Union on this issue, and through these documents Gorbachev could prove to Gorkov and others that there was no threat. (S)

The President: In London, we tried to make it perfectly clear that NATO is not a threat to the Soviet Union. I think we made some progress. What is the status of Soviet troops? (S)

Prime Minister Antall: The Soviet Union still has two full divisions in Hungary. They are stationed near Budapest -- not by accident. There are other troops as well but these are not the main ones. They want to withdraw the bulk by February but keep some until June. Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia also have a logistic tail in Hungary. When we said in June we are leaving the Warsaw Pact, we were not joined by the Poles or Czechs. They did not dare risk it, but during recent months they said they would join us. (S)

The President: What is the popular attitude toward Soviet troops? (S)

Prime Minister Antall: Indifference mainly. (U)

The President: They are not seen as a threat to change? (U)

Prime Minister Antall: No. We got the impression during recent negotiations that the Soviets would do away with the organization of the Warsaw Pact. They would rather take the initiative to do it -- for reasons of prestige -- than have others just leave. This will apply by next summer unless the position of Gorbachev changes. The problem is the troops have nowhere to go in the Soviet Union. Their commander told me that 2 1/2 billion rubles would be necessary for building apartments, and they want us to pay it. We gave them a list of damages their forces have done. It is much more. There was no reason after 1955 for the Soviet presence. You enumerated the different problems we face in the arrival ceremony, but we also may face the collapse of the Soviet economy. Soviet trade amounts to 4 billion dollars and all this is being imperiled. Our part of the world should not be pushed into the background by the Gulf crisis. (S)

The President: It is very important not to let that happen. (U)

Prime Minister Antall: I am counting on you. Let me comment on the Gulf crisis. We are giving you technical data and blueprints of the Iraqi air defense system. We have joined the embargo but Hungary was not a big trader with Iraq. Hungary has participated in help for Jordan, and we are working on a group of military surgeons which we could put at your disposal. We can't send combat troops. We have nothing trained for this kind of operation. (S)

The President: How do you think the embargo is working? (S)

Prime Minister Antall: It would be dangerous if the crisis was prolonged too long or if Saddam Hussein gets away with this. (S)

The President: I agree on both points. (U)

Prime Minister Antall: He has to go. There is no other solution. If he were thrown out, it would be by Khomeini types. A military solution is the only practical way. (S)

The President: The Gulf countries agree with you. We have a big coalition -- land and sea -- working. I wondered how long the coalition will survive without a resolution of the problem. Today the American people support the action, but I don't know for how long. (S)

Should we join the others for a minute? (U)

Prime Minister Antall: Just a couple of questions. I doubt the Soviets can cooperate long in the Gulf, because anything can happen in the Soviet Union. I told Webster to consult with the Turks (and Kurds) rather than the Arabs to find a military faction in Iraq. A provocation could be shifted against Israel to create a diversion. Perhaps you should try to force him to leave Kuwait and he might fall. If not, force is the only solution. (S)

The President: I am in close touch with Ozal. So far the Soviets have been helpful but maybe they couldn't be counted on if we used force. What do you think? (S)

Prime Minister Antall: You should leave the initiative with Iraq and then you could get the right reaction from the Soviets. They dread Islamic influence. The big problem is soldiers in the Soviet Army. You should negotiate with them. (S)

The President: We are in close touch. The Chinese have behaved well, but I am not sure for how long. They are trying to starve out our Embassy in Kuwait and we cannot tolerate that. That is a point beyond which we cannot go. Protection of our citizens is very important. (S)

Prime Minister Antall: In the Soviet Union, besides the Baltic and the south, the Ukraine is a big problem. The Ukrainians want independence in foreign policy. They want to move toward that, and not an integration process. The Ukrainians make serious gestures themselves toward the Hungarian minorities. (S)

The President: We have many in the U.S. (U)

Prime Minister Antall: You should move with caution. (S)

The President: There is much in motion regarding the Baltic states. (S)

Prime Minister Antall: We are making it clear we believe in the independence of the Baltics. As for our neighbors, tension is high in Czechoslovakia and critical in Yugoslavia. War is possible. We have no interest in trouble there. The Croats and Slovenes have been in touch and ordered police arms, but they were confiscated by Yugoslavia. They wanted heavy armor but we turned that down. (S)

The President: Would you be involved in a conflict? (S)

Prime Minister Antall: No, but there would be huge refugee groups. I will meet with Jovic. We are at a critical point. The government is committed to privatization, but economic problems can create social problems. I don't know if we can control the situation. If we don't, that would be a huge propaganda victory for conservatives in the Soviet Union and China. ~~(C)~~

The President: It is critical that does not happen. Will you see people at Treasury? We want to help. Then we can talk tonight as well. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Antall: There is no political force in Hungary which can substitute for the center and right of center. We have got a situation now because of unpopular measures we had to impose. The radicals are taking advantage of that. ~~(C)~~

The President: I understand your message. Your success is integral to our concept of a Europe whole and free. We need practical ways to help you succeed. Please discuss this frankly with our people. Then I will get back to you after I get their comments. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Antall: We don't expect you to solve our problem directly, but to use your influence to help us. ~~(C)~~

-- End of Conversation --