

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Prime Minister Robert Hawke of Australia on February 7, 1991

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Prime Minister Robert Hawke of Australia
Charles Gaul, Notetaker

DATE, TIME February 7, 1991 07:21 - 07:47
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President telephoned Prime Minister Hawke concerning the present situation in the Persian Gulf war. (U)

The President: Hey Bob, how are you?

PM Hawke: G'day George, how are you doing?

The President: I am calling because we have not talked in a while and I wanted to let you know how things were going in the Gulf. Basically things are going well. I would like to make a couple of points, then if you have any questions I will be glad to answer them. The war is going well. The air campaign is accomplishing its objectives, our losses are less than we thought they would be. There have been some coalition losses and the tragic brutalization of the POWs continues. We will dictate the tempo of the war -- not Saddam -- we will only go on the ground when our commanders think the time is right. I suppose you know that Cheney and Powell are going to go to Saudi Arabia to go over everything with the commanders. We are not in a rush. If a ground war is necessary we are confident. We are softening up his ability to wage war by attacking his Republican Guard. Bob, Saddam is saying we are targeting civilians--we are not. He is calling these bridges civilian targets, but these are used to resupply his troops -- they are not civilian targets, my conscience on this point is clear.

We are watching the movement of Iraqi aircraft to Iran. We have been assured by the Iranians, publicly and privately, that they will stay in Iran. We are concerned that Iran is saying there are only 20 in the country and we know there are five or six times that many. Many of them are his top line fighters. Iran assures us they are watching them. Bob, I have been assured that our military can protect against any kind of surprise from these aircraft.

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2009-0676-MR
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There are still rumors of peace talks, but Saddam can end it at any time by withdrawing from Kuwait and fully complying with the UN Resolutions. Every time there is talk of a peace offer -- when they talk to Aziz or Hammadi -- the bottom line always is that they will not withdraw from Kuwait. Like I said in my speech at the UN, we want to work for peace, but the brutality continues. We have reduced the SCUD threat by using a hell of a lot of firepower, but we cannot be sure it has been eliminated.

Bob, Jordan is saying we have targeted civilian trucks on the highways. We have conclusive proof that the Iraqis use culverts on this highway to hide SCUDS. I am sorry the Jordanians were hit, but it is war. We have no intent to target legitimate commerce, but as long as they use the road for these SCUD attacks against Israel it is risky to use the road. King Hussein's speech last night was a surprise -- his rhetoric was unhelpful. I know he is under a lot of domestic pressure. I am trying to be objective, to think of our long standing friendship, but I think he made a mistake getting so closely associated with Saddam.

The environmental terrorism continues, we know he is pumping this oil. Urban terrorism too -- you probably heard about this attack at Whitehall this morning. I wish the Iraqi people would throw him out. We control the seas and air.

PM Hawke: Thanks for the clear and concise update, George. I would like to comment and ask a couple of questions. More than most, I know the pressure you are under. I just want to say how much I admire your handling of this situation. Cheney, Powell and Schwarzkopf are all doing well. We share your grief over the losses. I get daily intelligence and military briefings and share your view that things are going well. I share your view that casualties are lower than we could have reasonably expected. I share your view that we must accept higher risks in order to keep civilian casualties low. You are succeeding admirably in keeping civilian casualties low. We are committed to the coalition and the UN resolutions and the way we are going about it. We support the way the U.S. is backing the UN war aims.

The President: Well, we appreciate your support. I want you to know we have no intent to destroy Iraq or punish the Iraqi people.

PM Hawke: George, we must start to think about the post-war situation. I was watching CNN and saw Baker's House testimony. I feel you have it right. We must tackle all Mid-East problems. World peace is a problem without it. We will be involved with you in it. I have one question. I felt from the beginning that there was an outside chance that we have got air superiority, and are attacking strategic targets, and his forces in Kuwait, do you think the conflict can end without a ground war?

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The President: Bob, that is a good question, I wish I could answer it. It is hard to assess the damage to the Republican Guards. No military commander can say that air will do it. I do not want a prolongation of the war. I am concerned about its effect on public opinion and that his propaganda can take hold. I might make the case that the air war might do it. There is always the possibility that something unforeseen could happen to Saddam Hussein a la Ceausescu -- he rules by terror.

PM Hawke: George, let me make clear that we are with you. There is only one way to resolve it, complete immediate withdrawal. George, I have an observation on the press conference in Jordan. I know the King, and his brother -- I know his brother better. I agree that he made a mistake. It is a pity he could not have had more strength and not follow Saddam so closely.

The President: I'll tell you his Arab neighbors are livid.

PM Hawke: Obviously George we are concerned about the Soviet Union. It looks like Gorbachev wants to save the empire over all else. He is in bed with the hard liners. How do you see it? Will his support on the Gulf lessen?

The President: Not necessarily, unless he leaves the scene. We cannot condone what is going on. I am called a Gorbachev lover because of not anticipating this. It is important here because of the question of freedom. I believe him when he says he did not issue the order to use force. You have caught me on a pessimistic day. It is a powder keg. I feel a special responsibility because we do not recognize the incorporation of the Baltics and there are a hell of a lot of Balts here. We cannot move further on commerce because he has not been able to go forward on reforms that would allow economic assistance. I like him, but he is captured by reality. He cannot move the country forward. Do not make things difficult for him. Tell him his policy is not good, but keep the Gulf in mind. If they did jump ship, we are far enough along that it will not make a difference.

If they did go to the UN it could be a problem, but I do not think so.

PM Hawke: You are in the best position to know. The military leaders still nurture old ideas -- they think the U.S. wants to destroy them. We must let them know we want to coexist peacefully.

The President: I hope we are past that stage now. We have had very frank exchanges with the military and the KGB, but the Leninist right and the military right are still a concern.

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PM Hawke: Well George, I have two things I would like to go over quickly. We were thrilled by de Klerk's speech to parliament. We took the lead in encouraging these changes and we feel a moral obligation to phase out sanctions. The awfulness of apartheid will be removed. We want to take the lead in the Commonwealth to encourage it.

The President: We are totally in agreement. de Klerk told me the other day, I called him, that he was very pleased with your stand. He mentioned Australia specifically. We are in total accord -- we will try to reward him for going in this direction.

PM Hawke: Fine. I know you cannot travel with this war on, but we still want you to come to Australia. I can guarantee you a very enthusiastic welcome.

The President: Yes, I still want to get down there to see you again and your country. I want to get out of here, but the war has screwed up my foreign travel plans. It has screwed up lots of things.

PM Hawke: Well George, thanks for the call.

The President: Well, thank you. Let's keep in touch. Goodbye

PM Hawke: Goodbye

-- End of Conversation --

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