

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

1331

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR on February 21, 1991 (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Mikhail Gorbachev
Interpreter: Peter Afanassenko
Notetaker: Condoleezza Rice, NSC Staff

DATE, TIME February 21, 1991, 6:45 - 7:20pm
AND PLACE: The Residence

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

President Gorbachev: Good morning, it's morning here. (U)

The President: I know. Why are you working so late? (U)

President Gorbachev: Hello, good afternoon to you. I have spent three hours talking to Tariq Aziz and wanted to immediately inform you about it. The conversation took place on the basis of a serious shift in their position. Today I can see some kind of impression based on realism. After our conversation, it seemed we were developing such a scheme as a political solution of the conflict. First, I want to make a couple of points. First, we rebutted all their attempts to tie the main issue of withdrawal to all the other questions of the region. Secondly, we firmly pushed your positions of an exchange of POWs and the restoration of the authority and return of legitimate power to Kuwait. (S)

The scheme looks like the following now: (S)

1. Iraq declares an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of troops from Kuwait;
2. The withdrawal starts the next day after the ceasefire;
3. The withdrawal will be exercised in strictly fixed terms and dates;
4. It is after duration of the term when two thirds of all the troops are pulled out of Kuwait, that the economic sanctions would be released;

5. After complete withdrawal from Kuwait, then the reason for adoption of the UN resolutions will be eliminated and they will no longer have any standing;

6. Verification of withdrawal is exercised by observers authorized by UN Security Council.

The most complicated point, but I should say all the points were complicated, but the most complex was the term or duration for withdrawal. (S)

Since the POWs would be released after the ceasefire and since we can return the legitimate authorities of Kuwait and we have agreed on the unacceptability of tying this up with Palestinian and other issues -- we have eliminated these questions from the agenda. (S)

But on the withdrawal they said that it would take about six weeks. We said that was unacceptable and we put in front of them the question of reducing this term by at least twice (half?). And during the first weeks, two thirds have to be pulled out, and from the very first day they will be pulled out on a large scale. Aziz claimed it is unrealistic because all the communications and facilities have been destroyed. The bridges are destroyed. But, now they have the conditions we put in front of them. (S)

Right now he will be in touch with Baghdad, and today from 8 or 9 in the morning the work will continue, and in a thorough and detailed way we must examine each issue. I don't know what Baghdad will say, what their final reaction will be, but I have the impression that there is an important shift here. We are insisting on having an answer from them in the first half of the day so that we can complete it all. If we can reach an acceptable position, we can let this matter be public and involve the UN General Secretary. Maybe, George, you will also think about it. That, in a quick way, tells you the essence of these very sharp and serious conversations. (S)

The President: First, thank you very much for the courtesy of this phone call. Secondly, I thought Bessmertnykh made good a comment earlier this week when he said it is not up to Bush to reject the plan because this is a matter we are talking to Tariq Aziz about. I understood what he meant and I think it was a very good point. We heard the speech today by Saddam Husayn and saw nothing in there positive and, unless there is total change, I would be surprised if he would accept these terms. (S)

Having said that, I would be less than frank if I did not make several comments here having just listened to these ideas for the first time. Very candidly, to be very honest with you, we have no trust anymore in anything the man says. This is not just the U.S., it is the other coalition forces too. The idea of stopping

and hoping he will then follow through on a cease fire, I am certain will be unacceptable to the coalition, I am certain of that. (S)

We are convinced he is beating up these POWs and this has the same devastating effect in our country as it would in your country if these were Soviet soldiers. There has to be an immediate release of POWs. He has not even permitted the ICRC to see these people, whereas the Saudis hold several thousands of Iraqis who are being well treated, certifiably so. (S)

There is another UN resolution which relates to damages or reparations, and that obviously some of the Kuwait leaders and Saudi leaders feel very strongly that there has to be a proper pay back for the environmental damage and other damage that is called for under one of the UN resolutions. I don't know whether there was any discussion of an arms embargo, but the idea of releasing the sanctions until these points are totally satisfied is not good. The question of weapons or nonconventional weapons, chemical, biological and nuclear, is something that is very important to the countries that we are standing with there. I am sure that would be important to the Soviets and I don't see how we resolve that question, but the idea that he can somehow get a victory out of a crushing defeat would simply be unacceptable.

(S)

One problem that Jim may have mentioned to Bessmertnykh is if you take off the economic sanctions before the dust settles, they start rearming and they ought to use their vast oil revenues for peaceful means. But if you remove economic sanctions to get him to stop or withdraw, that problem is very much still on the table, it seems to me. (S)

I appreciate very much the effort you are trying to make on the time of withdrawal but our estimates and those of our coalition partners have been carefully determined. It took him only 48 hours to get a hell of a lot of troops in Kuwait and, now I admit that a lot of their transportation is down, but they can do a lot better than a relatively slow withdrawal and I think you were right to point that out to them but I would have to think very carefully about any formula other than we have proposed. The UN resolutions include, I think, talk about their going back to their positions before the invasion and they can go back into southern Iraq without going over any bridges. But those are just some preliminary thoughts. This comes as very big news to us and we will start our conference with the other countries who have stakes in this on the ground there. (S)

President Gorbachev: George, I understand that we are discussing an issue of great importance and that is why I am thinking about your arguments in the most careful way. I really highly appreciate that we are working together in the spirit of complete

understanding. Today, there may be a serious shift by Saddam and in the thinking of Saddam and people around him. There would have been no changes like this if we hadn't acted together before January 15 and after. I do not want to underestimate the role of the international community's sanctions as well as the burden of arms and military sanctions carried out by the U.S. Administration and American people. And everything is changing as a result of the efficiency of all these measures and efforts. (S)

We have our reservations in believing Saddam who made such a speech as he made today. But we also keep this in mind, but when we discussed these proposals and the formulation of all these positions, we decided to check their intentions and told Aziz that we will make it known to all the news media. And he said they have adopted the decision to go for this move and he agreed to make it all public which I think means a change is taking place there. (S)

I think that we must try to realize the fruits of these activities we have undertaken now -- to forestall unaccounted casualties on the coalition forces, as well as humanitarian approach toward Iraqi people. This is point number one. Number two, you speak about lifting sanctions, but we have tied it up in a tough way so that after two thirds have pulled out all economic sanctions lifted and rest will be lifted afterwards. Speaking about the POW issue, we put it in a tough way reflecting absolutely your position. As soon as we can do this we will be working on a system of security in this region and will not allow any rearming of Iraq. So we are always taking into account our agreed positions and joint approach. And in my conversation I completely put it on the table with Tariq Aziz, saying our positions were coordinated with you. (S)

That is what I wanted to say. Maybe you will give some thought and our people will work on it now. (S)

The President: Do you think Saddam has signed off on these positions, that he will accept them, even though we have reservations? (S)

President Gorbachev: Judging by Aziz' statements, that some of the questions he has to coordinate with Baghdad, but I still see that the decision was taken in principle by them. If they refuse now to this kind of approach then all the blame will be on them. We are putting these questions toughly, of course they have to give the answer, and that is it. (S)

The President: Well, thank you very much. I want to reassure you once more that we understand and appreciate what you are doing, and we are determined to continue to work with the Soviet Union when this is all over. We know that if it had not been for

your total consultation and cooperation with us that we would never have gotten the UN action, and though I have problems with some of these proposals, I want you to know that nobody here thinks you are doing anything other than trying to be extra helpful and working toward peace. There is a lot of speculation in our country, but I feel strongly you are playing a very helpful and constructive role that will save lives. I still have problems, but I will do what you suggest, and we will talk with our coalition partners as soon as we can. (S)

President Gorbachev: Okay George. I would like to add that no winds and no storms can put us off the course we have made toward cooperation with the U.S. President, and that is a reflection of the fact that this is a vital necessity for us and to some extent to your country as well and believe this is the strategy we will follow. (S)

The President: I am delighted, and hope you will be back in touch if you get anything from Baghdad. We would be very interested because time is running out. (S)

President Gorbachev: Okay, goodbye. (U)

The President: Thank you very much. (U)