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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR on February 22, 1991 (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
President Mikhail Gorbachev  
James A. Baker, Secretary of State  
Interpreter: Peter Afanassenko  
Notetaker: Condoleezza Rice, NSC Staff

DATE, TIME February 22, 1991, 11:31am - 12:43pm  
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

Secretary Baker: Hello. (U)

The President was trying to reach you and I tried to reach Sasha -- we could not, he asked that I give the message that he wanted to give to you. (U)

I am calling you from his office -- he has gone to another engagement. (U)

Had he been able to talk to you, he wanted to say the following. (U)

We know you are making an intensive and useful effort as we have said publicly. (S)

And we recognize that Iraq's position has changed. But Saddam is now blowing up Kuwait's oil production and refining capabilities -- in fact he seems to have adopted a "scorched earth" policy. It seems he is taking advantage of the talks with you to destroy Kuwait and play for time. Much of this seems to have been started earlier today. We do not believe that the world can wait and let him do this. So we will be proposing a procedure by which we can avert a ground campaign and bring the war to an end. In effect, this builds on what you have done. (S)

When the President was unable to reach you, he went ahead with a press statement that has just been concluded. I will not repeat that since it will be available to you. Except to say that it provides for a 24 hour waiting period before there would be the initiation of any ground campaign. The President said publicly that he would be releasing a detailed statement on what we think is required by way of Iraqi withdrawal in order to avert a ground campaign. (S)

This statement has not yet been released and I would like to summarize it for you. (U)

It says in the operative part of the statement: (U)

In a final effort to obtain Iraqi compliance with the will of the international community -- the United States after consulting with the government of Kuwait and our other coalition partners declares that a ground campaign will not be initiated against Iraqi forces if prior to 12:00 U.N. time, Saturday Feb 23, Iraq publicly accepts the following terms and communicates that to the United Nations: The terms are as follows:

Begin a large scale withdrawal from Kuwait by 12:00 U.N. time, Saturday Feb. 23. (U)

Complete military withdrawal from Kuwait in one week. (U)

Given the fact that Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait in a matter of hours, anything more than a week would not meet the full terms of the UN Resolution. (U)

Within the first forty-eight hours remove all forces from Kuwait City to allow for the prompt return of the legitimate government of Kuwait and remove its forces from prepared defenses along the Saudi-Kuwait and Saudi-Iraq border. From Bub'iyah and Warbah and from Kuwait's Rumayllah oil field. (U)

Within the one week specified above return all forces to their positions of August 1 in accordance with UN Resolution 660. (U)

In cooperation with the ICRC release all POWs and third country civilians being held against their will. (U)

Return the remains of deceased and killed coalition servicemen. This action to commence immediately with the initiation of the withdrawal and to be completed within 48 hours. (U)

Remove all explosives and booby-traps including those on Kuwaiti oil installations. (As an aside, I may say that it may already be too late for that.) And designate Iraqi military liaison officers to work with Kuwaiti personnel on the operational details of withdrawal to include the provision of information on land or sea mines. (S)

Cease combat air patrols over Iraq and Kuwait except for transport flights carrying withdrawing troops. And allow coalition aircraft exclusive control over and use of Kuwaiti airspace. (U)

Cease all actions against Kuwaiti citizens and property and release all Kuwaiti detainees. (U)

U.S. and coalition partners reiterate that their forces will not attack retreating Iraqi forces, and will exercise restraint as long as withdrawal proceeds in accordance with the above guidelines and there are no attacks on other countries. (U)

Mr. President, in the beginning of this statement which I did not read there is a statement that the conditions in the Iraqi offer to you must be eliminated. This statement means that there must be a rescision of all other UN resolutions. And the suggestion that there should be a lifting of economic sanctions in exchange for partial withdrawal. President Bush has arrived back while I have been reading this to you and wants to talk with you. (U)

The President: Mikhail, I am anxious to get your reaction. Jim tells me he has read you the entire statement. But I must tell you I can't believe that Tariq Aziz knew what Saddam was going to do to these oil fields. The photographs from the air are absolutely unbelievable they are so devastating. I am so glad to have this conversation and sorry we couldn't get the call through before I made the public statement. The details of what Jim has read to you have not been made public yet. But Marlin Fitzwater will be announcing it very soon. What is the state of play on your end? Thanks for trying hard once again. (S)

President Gorbachev: O.K. thanks and hello to you. I was away because I had to attend a big political rally in the Kremlin Palace of Congress for Army Day and I really was not in a position to leave that gathering because all the T.V. cameras were there and I had 6000 people there. (S)

The President: We are both slaves to the T.V. that's why I had to go ahead with my statement. (S)

President Gorbachev: So there is no misunderstanding. Now on substance. I listened very carefully to what Jim has been reading out to me and I have several questions. The way I understand it, what we did over the past 24 hours in agreeing with Iraq and what is submitted to Saddam is not acceptable to participants in the coalition. I wish to recall once again, exactly what I mean. And this is how the problem looks and we are awaiting a reply from Saddam. (S)

(1) Iraq agrees to fully comply with the terms of the UN Resolution in other words to immediately and unconditionally withdraw all of its troops from Kuwait to their positions prior to August 1.

That is quoted from the UN resolution. (U)

The resolution does not mention Kuwait but we incorporated it into our first point. (S)

(2) The withdrawal of troops is to begin the day following the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities in the air, sea and ground. (U)

(3) The withdrawal of troops is to be completed within 21 days -- including Kuwait city within the first four days. (U)

Jim mentioned that it took a short time for Iraq to send in its troops -- to be true to reality -- he was building that group of forces for seven months. (S)

Now Iraq first demanded a three-four month period then they said would need six weeks but we pressed for a twenty-one day period and we said if we agreed to that timeframe it might still be an unacceptable condition for the U.S. and the coalition. (S)

(4) After the completion of withdrawals from Kuwait the motives behind the other UN Resolutions will have run their course and will no longer be necessary. (S)

This is not a precondition this is just for the UN Security Council to be seized with the issue and to take appropriate decisions. (S)

(5) All POWs will be released and repatriated within 3 days of the cessation of hostilities. This has even tougher language than your proposal. (S)

(6) Confirmation, verification and monitoring will be carried out by observers and/or by a peacekeeping force to be decided by the UN Security Council. (U)

I wish to express my initial reaction to what I heard from Jim. But I must put to you and to myself the following question. Where does our priority lie in putting a final touch on this settlement? Is it a political approach or the continuation of military operations and the escalation to ground operations? Now, I saw my role in cooperation with you in trying to find a political solution, as trying to protect the U.S. servicemen and peaceful Iraqi civilians from the suffering that may befall them. If you share this understanding then our task is to find a solution that is tough but also implementable. (S)

From this point of view the demands that troops be withdrawn in one week would be impossible to comply with and would open the way for continuation of the military course. Now of course it would be different if you see this political option of settlement as unacceptable. But if on the basis of what we have been able to accomplish here, though we are waiting for a reply from Saddam Hussein, and also on the basis of what you have suggested -- if we could combine them for the Security Council into a joint U.S.-Soviet approach. That would be very important solution if we could do that -- I will pass on to something else. (S)

In the Security Council we could promptly consider the whole complex of a joint plan based on what the two of us have said -- we would have a joint thing that we could consider in the UN Security Council. (S)

Especially since if we use political language on the need to withdraw troops from Kuwait City within four days there is a convergence between us and also on the POWs. (S)

What matters most is that by acting in this way we could show that as in the first instance, now at the very end we are acting together and have used all possible means including the first phase of military activity and now have succeeded in making Iraq backtrack and comply with the UN resolution. This would have taught a lesson to all others and this will be a new reality that all potential and likely aggressors would have to reckon with. Also by acting in this way we would avert the sliding into a difficult and dangerous phase. (S)

I would say that this would be a major victory. The world at large and Americans would give due course to your actions and also to our activities. And in light of the steady cooperation of the two of us and our other partners this would be indicative of the current state of our relations. This would indicate that the two Presidents while remaining true to their principles never forgot that the highest principle is the preservation of human life. (S)

If we accept that approach we may not get 100% support but there is every likelihood we could get 80-90% support. Therefore now that we have a very good shot at a political solution, I wish that we could avoid the situation sliding into a difficult phase and you and I should not squander the opportunity before us. I think we should not succumb to pressure and grow jittery. I want to be frank, we are feeling pressure in this country and I know there is pressure from others -- some would push us toward what we don't want to do. If we manage to turn events in the direction I have described, it would be an achievement that would last for sometime to come. (S)

So much for my line of argument. I am sorry I have been so emotional and used charged language. (S)

The President: First I have a question. Am I correct in saying that Saddam has not agreed to your six points? (S)

President Gorbachev: Tariq Aziz said that he was certain the President would support the six points but he had to transmit them personally. This is understandable just as Bessmertnykh or Baker cannot consent without the Presidents. (S)

The President: Do you have a time when he is supposed to come back to you? (S)

Gorbachev. He said immediately. This reply could come anytime. Aziz has stayed in Moscow and he is using the lines of communication we offered him. He has a man in our Embassy in Baghdad. (S)

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The President: Thanks for that clarification. We and those that I have consulted with and that Jim has consulted and our military are absolutely convinced he can withdraw in one week. Our initial proposal was 96 hours. He can get out if he is serious about it. We think he can get out in one week -- we have a difference there. (S)

Now on the broad philosophical approach you have outlined for me. I expect that you have people in your country that suggest you are too close with the United States. That is particularly true because of the good relationship with Iraq that you have had over the years and we understand that. Similarly, we have elements in this country who suggest we are staying too close to the center in the Soviet Union. We won't depart from that. But we have elements -- crossing liberal and conservative lines -- here who take a different view than Jim and I do. (S)

In spite of that we continue to make clear that we support your role and value your role and believe you are making a contribution. I mean it right from my heart and so does Jim. We view, and I would be glad to say this publicly, what you have tried to do as politically courageous given your long relationship (with Iraq), your standing as a superpower and your minority groups' sentiment. (S)

I don't want to see us pull apart even though we have profound differences at this moment on this particular question. (S)

Let me tell you what is driving our view. It is not just the U.S. -- it is a unanimous coalition view. First, I don't trust Saddam Hussein. Second, what he said yesterday is totally incompatible with not only what we are asking but what you asked. He is trying to restore himself in terms of the Arab world to the prestige of the status quo ante. What he has done and has done today does not merit that kind of restoration in our view. He knows that you have been working hard to bring a peaceful solution here. But what he is trying to do is to wiggle around and try to find time -- he has made time too short to go back to some kind of combination approach. I felt strongly about that after I stayed awake last night thinking about your suggestions and your role and knowing that you have brought him much further than anyone could have thought after his speech. (S)

But very candidly, he is taking advantage of this time and, I think, of your good-faith to destroy Kuwait. Get your people to show you photographs of what he has done to Kuwait this morning. About 9:00 this morning, our intelligence people brought me pictures and showed me the pictures from yesterday and the one from today and there is the blackest fire covering almost all of Kuwait you have ever seen in your life. This is the entire city I mean. And he did it after you were dealing with Tariq Aziz in good faith. And yesterday he fired a bunch of SCUD missiles again. So please understand, I have a lot of young soldiers over

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there and you and I have talked enough that I hope you know that I share your values on human life that you so eloquently outlined to me. But Mikhail do you know the whole time this propaganda was going on about civilian life -- that we worried about and didn't target-- do you know up to 200 young Kuwaitis 15-20 years old were killed and mutilated and the breasts cut off of the young women. That is the kind of man that we are up against. I know this is a report of the Emir of Kuwait. (S)

Let me reassure you that I have not changed my view on human life. I dread sending young men and women into battle and because of our position -- the forces of the coalition. And I know that what I am going to ask will put you in a difficult position. I would understand it if you simply said "George I cannot do it." I want you to tell Aziz that the hand-writing is on the wall. It is not just the U.S.-- it is the rest of this coalition and that we must have compliance with our proposal now. This is a serious proposal. He has not responded to your proposal. We have waited and waited and waited. We have been patient. We need an answer now. There are deadlines here and after what he has done in Kuwait -- we cannot yield. This proposal is deadly serious. (S)

I will send this statement to you instantly and, of course, my request is that you support our position after trying hard for a more reasonable position from your point of view but one that for the reasons I have given, we cannot go along now. If you can't support it, we would appreciate your not opposing it. We have not lost our senses and know the importance of the Soviet Union in all of this. Whatever happens in the next few days, I want to keep all doors open with you and with your country. We will never change from the view that you have a critically important role -- it is your neighborhood and some of them are your friends. We recognize Soviet interests in the area. I want to get our forces out of there just as soon as possible. I know how the Iranians and others feel. I want them out as soon as possible. I want to continue to stay in touch. Please examine what we have proposed. If you can encourage his adoption of this that is the best -- and at this point -- only way -- to save the lives you and I both want to. (S/S)

That is my appeal. I know you want to think about it. We will send the proposal on and welcome your views. (S)

President Gorbachev: I got it all and I want to make a brief comment or two. (S)

First, in practice we have the same assessment of Hussein. I think that his fate has been foreshadowed. Far be it from us to try to whitewash him or try and save him or to raise his prestige. You and I are compelled to deal with him because on the other side he is the only realistic figure there. (S)

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Second, I am not talking about Hussein or the methods he has employed over the last few hours -- I am talking about the possibility of taking advantage of the accomplishments we have behind us given the burden of the entire operation that rests with you and the tremendous contributions we have both made. I am talking about trying to attain the goals we both seek by turning things in a political direction. By doing so we could avoid great tragedy -- that is the central point and the main concern. And that is the main merit of this approach. (S)

Third, you have requested that we relay your demands to Tariq Aziz and the Iraqi leadership. If you can very rapidly send them to us, we will convey them to him. We will also describe your approach and position to him. But my final suggestion is as follows -- that we tentatively decide: (S)

We and you should come out with a joint initiative to convene the UN Security Council meeting in order to consider this package of demands. There would certainly be a lot of pressure in that meeting to take advantage and formalize what we get out of that meeting in a document. It would be a good thing if we got the best possible results. It would be just as good if we got an intermediate result that would satisfy both of us. As before, we will continue to give priority to our relationship with the United States. And of course the responsibility we bear before the international community and our peoples is to resolve the conflict and to accomplish the goals we set out before while avoiding a tragedy.

The President: The problem is we have heard nothing out of Saddam Hussein. That is essential before we implement this through the UN. We have resolutions and a mandate under 678 through the UN. He is stalling and ducking and sending Jordan and the PLO and Yemen in to stall and give his side. We have a mandate and we have to have a positive reply from him. But having spelled out the U.S. proposal, we cannot hold off. I will discuss this with Jim and with Scowcroft and others and let you know my reaction. But this is my first reaction. (S)

President Gorbachev: George, we did get a reaction from Hussein and his agreement to withdraw troops. We don't believe everything is satisfactory in his position. We made our position tougher. Now we need to hear from him again. (S)

The President: You have brought him along on delinkage and a concept of withdrawal but it falls far short of the unconditional withdrawal called for in the resolution. Let us talk about that here. Before I hang up I want to make one further point. (S)

Life goes on and I want to assure you we are pushing our people on the arms control proposals. I wrote you recently on CFE and naval infantry. I urge your personal attention to that because no matter what happens here -- common ground there would be very good. I have not lost my interest in moving forward with START - - I want to personally assure you of that. (S)



Thank you for the time. I am sorry for what might be a difference but the relationship is too important and it is not going to fall apart over Iraq. (S)

President Gorbachev: Good George. I am saying goodbye. I want you to know that I have given instructions to my people to look into the matter you just mentioned. One more word on Iraq -- we must give some serious thought to the way the position is developing and where in detail and substance the two positions coincide. Logic would prompt that we decide in favor of one option -- building on what we have done to try to avert a tragic turn in the situation. Best regards to your family. (S)

The President: Thank you and to Raisa. We need to do this more often in these difficult times. (U)