

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Brian Mulroney, Prime Minister of Canada

PARTICIPANTS: The President
John Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Robert Zoellick, Counsellor, Department of State
David Gompert, Special Assistant to the President for European and Soviet Affairs (Notetaker)
Richard Haass, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

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Brian Mulroney, Prime Minister
Joseph Clark, Minister for External Affairs
Others to be Determined

DATE, TIME March 13, 1991 (7:00p.m.-9:00p.m.)
PLACE: Ottawa, Canada

Prime Minister Mulroney: Mitterrand thinks that the United States and Canada are hostages to the Israeli lobby. He thinks North America cannot have a genuine understanding of the Middle East, that we do not appreciate the nuances as France does. This is all a part of the proprietary French interest that they pretend to have in the Middle East. That said, Mitterrand is a good guy and a loyal friend. (S)

General Scowcroft: Will the French push us to have a conference? Genscher made the point in Washington that it took five years before CSCE was able to have a conference. (S)

Prime Minister Mulroney: Gorbachev said he would like to help the United States achieve peace in the Middle East. What is your assessment of Gorbachev? (S)

The President: I'm being criticized by both the Right and the Left for my support of Gorbachev. The thing about Yeltsin is that his values are good, but I don't know about him. I don't know how Yeltsin would deal with us. In any case, there is a strong chance that if Gorbachev were replaced, it would be by someone from the Right, not by Yeltsin. Even then, I would not expect them to reverse what they have done in Eastern Europe.

But they could be a lot tougher both within the Soviet Union and on arms control. On the Gulf, Gorbachev was not unreasonable. He is our best bet. At the same time, we cannot be against reform within the Soviet Union. The Soviets need to have a place in the sun. It doesn't do us any good to stiff-arm them. That is our approach, but I have to tell you its controversial at home. The Soviet situation is unstable. Gorbachev knows our position on the Baltics. (S)

General Scowcroft: Yeltsin may be a true demagogue. It's very easy to attack the system, which is what he does. Its not clear what he would actually create. Yeltsin does not appear to be a constructive force. We also see that Gorbachev is using Primakov on the Middle East, and that is not necessarily a good sign. (S)

Prime Minister Mulroney: If Gorbachev is thrown out, we could go back to Stalin. Our summit in Paris concerning CSCE seems a long, long time ago. Are we doing enough to help Gorbachev? We have complained enough about the Baltics. When John Major saw Gorbachev, he criticized Canada. So I pose the question, are we really doing enough?

The President: I have to worry about Gorbachev's military, people like Yazov and Akhromeyev. We should stick with Gorbachev, he really wants to have a summit, but he is pulled away on CFE by his military. We are very close on START. He wants a summit. I will say okay, but I could face some grief at home. All I can do right now is to work with him where I can. In the Middle East they do have some legitimate interests and they were helpful in the United Nations during the crisis. They stuck with the coalition. We have to give them some credit. The Baltics are especially difficult in the United States, as I know it is for you because we have to deal with their ethnic supporters. They are not satisfied with our policies. So we're being careful. We haven't open Baltic offices yet like some of the others. (S)

Minister Joseph Clark: I wonder if there is not some way that we can help on the Baltics. I met with the Nordics. They have had a reply from the Soviets on CSCE that is encouraging. I'm a bit worried about the Baltic track we are on. It's driving us to create significant irritation in the relationship. There was a time when we recognized it would take a great deal of time for the Baltics to work things out with the Soviets. Is there no way we can get back to that more patient stance? (S)

The President: If Gorbachev could cut the Baltics loose, he would take off a great deal of the pressure. We should try to convince him that the Baltics are pivotal. Baltic independence is not anathema to him, he says that it is just important that they proceed along a constitutional path, wherever it ends. (S)

General Scowcroft: But he is worried about the precedent of Baltic secession. (S)

The President: If he could get the Baltics solved, he'd get us off his back. (S)

Prime Minister Mulroney: Gorbachev's mind cannot really conceive of a true democratic system or a free enterprise system. Gorbachev asked me how Canada could be so productive with so few people. He just didn't understand. I told him the reason why we were so productive is that the farmers own their own land. When I told him that, he lost interest. He then said something heretical about the possibilities in the Soviet Union, and Raisa pulled him up short, giving him a Marxist-Leninist line. So the intellectual lynch-pin is missing in his mind. He is a Marxist-Leninist who is trying to reform himself. (S)

The President: You are right, he has no concept. (S)

Governor Sununu: The Soviets have no memory. Unlike the East Europeans who were once free within the life-time of many of them, this is not true in the case of the Soviet people. (S)

Minister Joseph Clark: The Soviet people have faith in the "good czar" -- someone who will take care of everything. I guess Yeltsin is the "good czar" these days. But he is ruthless and highly adaptable. (S)

The President: I think our best policy is steady as she goes. (S)

General Scowcroft: The Left and the Right in the United States would want us to give aid directly to the republics. (S)

The President: I guess Yeltsin is not all bad, but we are not sure how to deal with him. If we overplay our relationship with him, we could play into the hands of the worst elements within the Soviet Union. (S)

Prime Minister Mulroney: If you deal with Yeltsin, you will hurt Gorbachev. (S)

Let me tell you about Canadian politics. To the Left Wing in Canada, Canadian independence is measured by being an unreliable ally to the United States. This philosophy of the Left is strong in the universities and the media. When we committed forces to the coalition in the Gulf crisis, we were behind in the polls and our approval rating went way up. So Canadian public opinion has a split personality. The war was okay but there is really no conservative political base left in Canada. (S)

The President: It helped me to understand public opinion when I was told that in 1939/1940 the polls indicated that 90% of the American people were against us getting involved in the War. (S)

Prime Minister Mulroney: I just want to say that if we all live to be a 110 no one will witness a better performance than that of

George Bush during this war. I was at the White House with George Bush and Brent Scowcroft at the beginning, and I was with them at the end. He never flinched. And you handled this with incredible smoothness. I cannot remember a stronger American President. It was an historic performance and I am proud to be here with you. (S)

The President: It was a team effort in the United States and it was a team effort internationally. Canada was steadfast throughout and I thank you.

-- End of Conversation --