

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Vaclav Havel, President of
Czechoslovakia

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Vaclav Havel, President
Interpreter: Lisa Valyiova
Notetaker: Robert Hutchings, NSC Staff

DATE, TIME August 19, 1991, 4:20 - 4:34 p.m.
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Mr. President, can you hear me? I wanted to call because I know you are especially concerned because of your proximity and history with the Soviet Union. First, I want to say that you are very much in our minds as we try to handle this situation. I want to get your suggestions, but before doing that I'd like to go over one or two points if that is agreeable. ~~(S)~~

President Havel: Yes, of course, that is perfectly acceptable.
(U)

The President: As of now, we see no Soviet threat to the security of Czechoslovakia nor do we believe they will want to give you any trouble because they have plenty of their own. The Soviets also know that creating problems for you would produce an even stronger western reaction. But we will keep a close eye on the situation and keep you continuously informed from this end. We might be bold enough to suggest that you help keep your people calm, as I am trying to do here, and avoid any actions that could be used against the reformers there in the Soviet Union. For our part, we will be putting out a statement, yet another statement, today talking about the need for the reform, and our support for the reforms, and for openness and perestroika and for abiding within the law in the Soviet Union. But I'd be very interested in your views. ~~(S)~~

President Havel: Well, first of all I would like to thank you for calling me. Our people are condemning this coup and are getting ready for demonstrations because they think it is similar to 1968. It is exactly the same, identical scenario that was used in Czechoslovakia in 1968. On the other hand, in our society there is some kind of nervousness whether this will affect us or whether this will threaten us here in Czechoslovakia. I personally am convinced that the Soviets will not push into or expand into Europe. On the other hand, I understand the nervousness which is prevailing in Hungary, in Poland and in Czechoslovakia. It is also possibly the fear of an

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enormous influx of refugees. We are taking all kinds of security measures and we also have plans for an alternative. But, at any rate, the most important for us here politically is to have the support of the western countries which will calm our inhabitants. It might even be enough if I were to say publicly that I had received a telephone call from President Bush, and in that way have a certain calming effect on people. ~~(S)~~

The President: I would be delighted for you to do that and would like your permission to do that here, because we do want to show our commitment to your country. ~~(S)~~

President Havel: I would be very glad, Mr. President, if you were to mention this and if you were to mention the democratic progress and attitudes in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland are developments which cannot be reversed any longer. They cannot turn the clock back. I would like to add to this that the development toward emancipation and self-determination in the Soviet Union -- that, too, is irreversible. This coup will simply complicate things, delay matters, create no end of conflict, but it will not reverse the general development. ~~(S)~~

The President: I am inclined to agree. We are trying to figure out the best way to support Gorbachev and Yeltsin. ~~(S)~~

President Havel: Yeltsin is the only man who is elected freely by tens of millions of inhabitants of the Soviet Union, and that is a really good argument. ~~(S)~~

The President: Yes, very good. (U)

President Havel: And with respect to the new government, the new people in power, as they said today, they wish to dismiss the legitimately elected parliament and legitimately elected leadership of people as it stands now. I know Mr. Yanayev personally, and I know him to be a man who is totally gray and without expression -- very jovial, but I think a puppet of the KGB and of the army. ~~(S)~~

The President: I met him over there and must say that I liked him, but I have the same general opinion. Well, I'm glad to have had this conversation. I would welcome any further ideas on your part that we might say or that we might do. In the meantime, I will proudly mention this telephone call and certainly reiterate our strong support for the irreversible democracy that the eastern European countries now have. ~~(S)~~

President Havel: I would like to thank you for that, Mr. President, on behalf of all our citizens, who will find mention of this to calm them and encourage them. ~~(S)~~

The President: All right, sir. Please call if you have any problems and I will gladly receive your phone call. ~~(S)~~

President Havel: Thank you. I will take advantage of this opportunity if there is anything urgent and will call you. ~~(S)~~

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The President: Thank you and goodbye. (U)

President Havel: Thank you and please greet Barbara. (U)

The President: I'll tell her. Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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