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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Boris Yeltsin of the Republic of Russia, USSR

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Boris Yeltsin
Interpreter: Peter Afanassenko
Notetaker: Beth Sanner

DATE, TIME August 20, 1991, 8:18 - 8:35am
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Just checking up to see how things are going from your end. (U)

President Yeltsin: Good morning. (U)

The President: Good morning. I just wanted a first hand report on the situation from your end. (U)

President Yeltsin: The situation is very complex. A group of eight individuals essentially put together an anti-constitutional coup. President Gorbachev is located in Farps in the Crimea. He is absolutely blocked, no way of reaching him. ~~(S)~~

President Yanayev is using the pretext that Gorbachev is ill, but this is not confirmed. Essentially a committee of eight people has taken over the presidency and established a state of emergency in Russian territory, and the Baltics. Troops have been brought up to Moscow, not only in the city, but in Moscow district and surrounding towns. And by issuing decision 1 and 2 the group has exposed itself as no more than a right-wing junta. I appeared before the people and soldiers and I said that actions of the Committee were unconstitutional, illegal, and have no force on Russian territory. ~~(S)~~

The building of the Supreme Soviet and the office of the President is surrounded and I expect a storming of the building at any moment. We have been here 24 hours. We won't leave. I have appealed to 100,000 people standing outside to defend the legally elected government. ~~(S)~~

Basically this is a right-wing coup, each member of the group is well known. They want to take over the democratically elected leadership of Russia, Leningrad, Moscow, and other cities. This morning I gave Lukyanov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, ten demands, the first of which is to meet with Gorbachev. ~~(S)~~

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Mr. President, it would be good if you yourself could demand to speak on the phone with Gorbachev and to rally world leaders to the fact that the situation here is critical. We've also announced a strike and practically all factories and plants are at a standstill. We will continue demanding this until the Committee is thrown out and tried in court. We are not losing any hope or faith unless they resort to the most extreme and bloody measures. Of course a wounded animal is the most dangerous thing and we have no assurances that they won't resort to extreme measures. (S)

The President: You have our full support for the return of Gorbachev and the legitimate government. We will reiterate that early today. I tried to place a call to Gorbachev yesterday and couldn't get through. But I like the idea of saying publically that I want to talk to him. I would be perfectly ... (S)

President Yeltsin: Yes, thanks for saying that. If Gorbachev is sick then we should demand international doctors, like the WHO, examine him. (S)

The President: We saw that you made that suggestion. I agree that it is a good idea. (S)

President Yeltsin: Yes, we have changes happening so fast that we should talk at the end of the day tomorrow. Things are literally changing hour by hour. (S)

The President: I'm happy to do that. I hope that the lines will not be cut off. (S)

President Yeltsin: Yes, Mr. President. I do appreciate your attention and support. The Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev has flown to the UN to report to the Secretary General. (S)

The President: I suggest that I call you at 5:00 tomorrow your time. You can try to call here. I'll try to call you, but if I can't get through, you try here. The number is... (S)

President Yeltsin: Understood (U)

The President: I would be prepared to call Yanayev, but I don't want to do anything to legitimize the regime. What is your thought on that. (S)

President Yeltsin: No, absolutely, you should not do that. An official call from you would legitimize them. We tried to send a group to the Crimea to meet with Gorbachev but he is surrounded by three circles of armed guards and KGB. (S)

The President: We'll keep trying to reach him. We're not hopeful but it legitimizes the Gorbachev regime. (S)

President Yeltsin: Mr. President. Thanks so much, these are very good positive steps. They will help all of us here. (S)

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The President: I will do all I can to keep the European countries on board - all of them. I talked to a number of leaders yesterday, are very supportive of the position you outlined and the position I outlined to them. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: Thanks very much. (U)

The President: Good luck and congratulations on your courage and commitment. We sympathize and pray with you. All the American people support you. What you're doing is absolutely right. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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