

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Prime Minister Jozsef Antall of Hungary

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Jozsef Antall, Prime Minister
Interpreter: Laszlo Szimonisz
Notetaker: Robert L. Hutchings, NSC Staff

DATE, TIME: September 20, 1991, 12:59 - 1:29 p.m.
AND PLACE: Aboard Air Force One EDT

The President: Mr. Prime Minister. This is George Bush. How are you, sir? (U)

Prime Minister Antall: Good afternoon, Mr. President. Thank you, I am very well. The reason I called you is because we take an extremely dire view of the situation that is evolving in Yugoslavia, right in our neighborhood. Since dawn today, there has been an offensive that has been widening in Croatia, both from the south and from the east. The tanks of the Yugoslav People's Army are coming against Croatia from the direction of Bosnia, and we are also expecting air attacks to commence against Croatia. Prime Minister Markovic has been totally isolated and is in a minority position within his government. The same way with President Mesic, who is Commander in Chief of the Army, but has lost his control. It appears that the army and Serbian guerrillas are operating totally on their own and without political control. For all practical purposes, the attempts at a cease-fire by Lord Carrington have been totally void. It is not working. This could be the last major attempt by the Yugoslav Army, because its reserves are dwindling. The budget that is for the army is about to be completely depleted. They are working on their last reserves in ordnance as well as in feeding their troops. This is their only opportunity to succeed -- by attempting a Blitzkrieg against Croatia. The question is whether the Croats would be able to resist until this Blitzkrieg is finished. On the Adriatic Sea and along their borders of Croatia, there continues to be conflagration. This touches us completely and directly, and there have been several violations of our sovereignty along our border in the last several days. We have approximately 30,000 refugees in this area from Yugoslavia now, of which only 10 percent are actually Hungarians. 90 percent are Croats. The number of soldiers has also increased. They are going to be disarmed, and we have to treat them separately from the civilians. (S)

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It appears that the time has come, and we don't see any other alternative that we would have but a common statement. The strongest pressure must be exercised, but the type of proclamation that would carry validity would require a statement that the U.S. backs the European Community. This should include the countries from around the region and perhaps even the Soviet Union, the Ukraine and Japan also. Until now, we have resisted acknowledging the independence of Croatia and Slovenia, together with the Austrians and the Italians, because we feel that these countries that I have mentioned earlier have very little influence on the Serbs. Only Anglo-Saxon countries -- Great Britain and the United States as well as France -- could put some pressure to which the Serbs would listen. (S)

Until there is a common stand against them, the Serb communist leaders will perceive that they have an opportunity to act. I personally visited Yugoslavia two weeks ago and spoke with Prime Minister Markovic and also with leaders of Croatia and Slovenia. It appears that the army and the Serb Chetniks cannot be controlled. They are trying to create a Greater Serbia, which poses an incredible danger and could serve as a destabilizing factor for the entire Balkan region. The highest prestige in front of these Serb generals today even still belongs to the Russians. They have the highest influence over them. This is why I feel it would be very important, Mr. President, if you could gather Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Yeltsin together and convince them to exert influence over the Serbian situation. Since yesterday, the Russians are not shipping any more weapons to the Yugoslav army. But it must be made very clear to them that we have the same forces operating in Serbia, the same kind of forces that have brought about the coup d'etat in the Soviet Union. We back the United Nations, a convocation of the Security Council. We have also informed them that we back the Canadian initiative. Prime Minister Markovic himself has accepted the theory of internationalizing this problem. He cannot himself rule and he cannot overcome this situation by himself. In northern Serbia and the Vojvodina we have one half million ethnic Hungarians, and in Croatia and in Slovenia we also have 50,000 each. It would be very difficult for us to acknowledge the independence of Croatia and Slovenia because immediately the Serbians would wreak vengeance on Hungarians in their territory. Thousands of Hungarians are called into the reserves from the Serbian part of Yugoslavia. (S)

Above all, Mr. President, I would like to ask you that the problem be treated as one of the most important problems in eastern and central Europe and a problem that touches on all of Europe. And if we cannot stop the onslaught of Serbia to take over this area, we could be expected to face 100,000 refugees. The Serbian democratic forces also need encouragement. In Belgrade and in other areas of the republic there are people who would support a democratic initiative, but they are also under tremendous pressure. The Adriatic oil pipeline has been sealed off by the Serbs. We still have some reserves, but should it continue, Czechoslovakia as well as Hungary would reach a critical point. (S)

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One more thing I'd like to point out, Mr. President: according to our most recent reports, there is a possibility that Slovakia will declare its independence next week. We still feel, and I'd like to emphasize, that in Yugoslavia we still feel that the best would be to have a commonwealth of sovereign nations, but more and more this has become a fiction rather than a reality. If we cannot take some definite steps at once, it is highly likely that very soon they will take this step towards independence in Czechoslovakia. There we will not have this sort of civil war, because the Czechs will not be fighting like the Serbs. They will give up Slovakia, counting on the fact that this would make their own economic resurgence much faster. But I believe we could have some serious disagreement with Slovakia between the federalists and the nationalists. We also have, close to the Hungarian border, about 800,000 ethnic Hungarians. Some of the nationalists in Slovakia, on the one hand, are extreme left, and the other side are extreme right. Potentially they have been under a certain amount of Soviet influence in the past. The reason I mention the situation of Czechoslovakia, Mr. President, is because I feel that this will culminate next week. (S)

In Hungary the situation is calm. We have taken precautions to take a large number of refugees, but in the border areas, the population is restless. For this reason, I have personally visited the border area. I was within three feet of the border with Yugoslavia. In Hungary, the situation is still stable, but we could face very serious energy-related as well as financial problems. And I see that in Yugoslavia if the world cannot take a unified step in order to contain it, then it would open the door to further destabilization in the entire area. So this is why I have called you, Mr. President, to mention all of this to you and to request that the U.S., together with Great Britain and supporting the UN, in this offer a very severe and stern warning. I would be extremely grateful to have that meeting on October 4 with you, Mr. President, when I would be able to see you when I come from New York to Washington. Please excuse the long details, Mr. President, but I felt it was extremely critical that I warn you of all the details so that you would be fully apprised of the situation and why we feel it is so serious. Hungary, of course, continues to be a stable country. But I have not called you to tell you about my own internal problems. Our political parties have pretty much the same viewpoint and are united on this subject. Perhaps we have a few emotional differences, but the government holds the whole situation strongly under control. Economic and business life goes on. (S)

The President: Well, let me say, in the first place, I got all that message loud and clear and, yes, I look forward to seeing you in our October 4 meeting. As far as I'm concerned, that is a deal, and I will look forward to seeing you then. We understand your position on not recognizing Slovenian or Croatian independence, and we agree that this could lead to a serious escalation. I understand what you want is a statement from the United Kingdom, possibly joined by the Soviet Union. I would like to know whether that is accurate and what you think such a

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statement should say. I was a little unclear on what you think is best there. (C)

Prime Minister Antall: First of all, Western Europe should take a unified position, and that still has not taken place yet. I would feel that perhaps the United States and Great Britain, even the G-7 together as the major powers, should make a separate statement. The reason the Soviet Union should be drawn into this is because the Serbian generals still pay some attention to what the Russians have to say. So I stress the importance of a unified proclamation condemning the situation and issuing a warning to the Serbians signed by the United States, by the Soviet Union and the Western European countries, bringing to attention the potential sanctions that could be instituted against Serbia and saying the world is not interested in cooperating with a country that engages in such activities. It would be very important to have some sort of West European armistice force or supervisory group to observe the activities, including the border areas with Yugoslavia. I would feel very strongly that the great powers, the signatories to this declaration, should also threaten the possibility of recognizing the independence of Croatia and Slovenia. This would be a detriment to the courage of the Serbians, and perhaps they would hold back their troops. But this would only have teeth if the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union would be signatories to such a statement. I have mentioned this to Chancellor Kohl and said it would not be a good idea for us in Hungary or even the Italians, Austrians or Germans on their own, because this would give an excuse for Serb historical reminiscence, that we are ganging up on them. (S)

The President: I think I understand more clearly what you are talking about. I'm on an airplane now out in our Midwest and I will be back in Washington this afternoon, but we will give some very serious thought to these constructive suggestions. As you know, we have been supportive of the EC initiative, feeling that if they can solve this problem under the able leadership of Lord Carrington, that would be the best, but I gather you feel that is not going to be successful. (C)

Prime Minister Antall: Yes. Completely, Mr. President. I have also talked with Mrs. Thatcher in Tokyo for an hour and a half and she is fully cognizant of the Yugoslavian situation. I think we might consider her as a possibility for a good will mission as the individual who would be able to handle this on behalf of the interested parties. (S)

The President: That's a suggestion, but to be candid, before we could be enthusiastic, I would want to be sure that the Prime Minister of the UK, the very able John Major, agrees to that.

(S)

Prime Minister Antall: I have met with Mr. Major in Paris recently, but I have not mentioned this particular issue to him.

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The President: OK. We will keep that in mind and begin to do a little diplomatic work now. I appreciate your phone call. ~~(S)~~ (C)

Prime Minister Antall: Please, I ask you, Mr. President, for a very swift response in this, because they are moving 25 to 30 kilometers a day and can become extremely problematic in a very short time. I would like to also express my solidarity with your problem in the Middle East. ~~(S)~~

The President: Thank you for the phone call. We will get right to work on it. ~~(S)~~ (C)

Prime Minister Antall: Thank you and goodbye. (U)

The President: Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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