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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
Mikhail Gorbachev, President of USSR  
Interpreter: Dimitri Zarechnak  
Notetaker: Ed A. Hewett

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: November 30, 1991, 9:01 - 9:37am  
Camp David

The President: Hello. (U)

President Gorbachev: Hello, George. I am glad to hear your familiar voice on the phone.

The President: I'm calling on a matter of some concern regarding Ukraine. I have read statements on the Soviet side that concerned me, and I'm sure you're concerned. (S)

President Gorbachev: George, I am glad that you initiated the conversation. I regard this as a continuation of our discussion in Madrid. (S)

The President: I would like to run through some talking points I've worked out with Jim Baker and Brent Scowcroft, and get your reaction. (S)

President Gorbachev: OK, I'm ready to listen and take notes. (S)

The President: First, I want to commend you on mediating the Azerbaijan-Armenia dispute. It is very good, and we commend you for that. (S)

President Gorbachev: We will try to take precisely that approach to end that conflict. But it is hard to expect immediate results. The differences are large. (S)

The President: I know. Now, on the Ukraine. Everything points to an overwhelming vote supporting independence. Worldwide this will be a powerful signal, really a celebration of the new atmosphere created when the attempted coup was put down. (S)

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You know our tradition as a democratic nation. We must support the Ukrainian people. But we want to do so in a way that encourages a peaceful transition to a new order, built on a productive relationship with the center, and a friendly Ukrainian-Russian relationship. We don't want to inadvertently create difficulties for you or Yeltsin. (S)

But if the referendum turns out as anticipated, then the only question is when and how we and other countries recognize Ukrainian independence. (S)

It would seem to us that recognizing Ukrainian independence could well bring them back into the union treaty process. When you remove any question about accepting their sovereignty, then they can participate without concern that doing so somehow signals their lack of independence. (S)

Look, if we move towards recognition, I would need to be clear that arrangements are made providing for the following points:

- collective, central control over nuclear weapons;
- a non-nuclear Ukraine, which is signatory to the NPT (the Non-Proliferation Treaty);
- respect for human rights, with equal rights for minorities; and
- the implementation of existing treaties (the START and CFE treaties). (S)

We will also continue to urge the Ukrainian government to implement market reforms, and to accept responsibility for its share of the Soviet Union's debt. (S)

I am asking Jim Baker to send a special emissary to Kiev to begin discussions on these points and others. We want a cooperative relationship with Ukraine. This emissary's discussions will help us determine our next steps. (S)

We will be making a statement shortly after the referendum that explains our approach. The statement will also note our desire to work closely with you and President Yeltsin. Obviously we will not say that we are recognizing Ukraine until these matters are worked out. (S)

I have not yet talked to Yeltsin. Clearly I want to do that. I am also consulting with NATO allies on our approach to the new situation. (S)

These are the key points. I'd like to get your reaction. Ambassador Strauss conveyed Shevardnadze's concerns here. I hope what I've said allayed those concerns. (S)

President Gorbachev: OK, George. I'll try to say something. What we are discussing is of key importance, not only for our relations, but also for the future of the union. It is something of interest not only for people here, but also in Europe and the entire world. Above all, it involves the fate of the union. (S)

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I won't hide that the leak from the White House saying that serious consideration was being given to recognizing the independence of the Ukraine by the U.S. -- especially because that leak came on the eve of the referendum -- that this was taken negatively. It appears that the U.S. is not only trying to influence events, but to interfere. (S)

Second, the majority of the republics have declared independence. That does not prevent them from participating in the formation of a new Union of Sovereign states. In fact, sovereignty gives them the freedom to participate. (S)

Thus the referendum does not automatically mean that Ukraine has broken ranks with the Soviet Union, that this is the end of Ukraine's relationship with the Union.

We want very much that in this subtle and important question, there is no rush. I would like to recall the situation in Yugoslavia, which has led to the current state of affairs. But, George, the current situation is even more complicated than that of Yugoslavia. If someone in Ukraine says that they are seceding from the Union, and someone says they are supporting them, then it would mean that 12 million Russians and members of other peoples become citizens of a foreign country. Crimea has already stated that if Ukraine distances itself from the Union, then Crimea will act to review the status of Crimea in Ukraine. The question of Donetsk will also emerge. (S)

We must all act -- and I hope for understanding from you on this, because it is important what position the President of the United States takes -- act in a way that does not push developments in the wrong direction. Bear in mind the advice of those who want the process to develop naturally. Time is needed for that. (S)

Here Yeltsin has forces pushing for an independent Russia, and toward a return of all Russian lands, including those now in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and others. If this process unfolds, that would be a catastrophe for Russia, Ukraine, and the rest of the world. (S)

Thus I would recall our last talk in Madrid, where we discussed the general interest of the U.S., and Europe in the retention of a reformed, democratizing Union. (S)

Those are the thoughts I wanted to outline to you. I just talked to Yeltsin. We will be paying close attention to the referendum in Ukraine. Possibly after the referendum I will arrange a meeting between the Presidents of Russia and Ukraine. So, I urge you to be very prudent and balanced, taking steps without haste, and to cooperate. (S)

The President: First of all, I want to cooperate. We are welcoming independence to guard against radical elements in Russia and Ukraine. I want to support the reasoned position you've outlined to work with the parties. (S)

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Mikhail, if the referendum goes as expected, what will you and Yeltsin say about independence -- not recognition -- but independence? (S)

President Gorbachev: We will say what I already said, and I hope Yeltsin says. Independence strengthens the sovereignty of Ukraine, and gives the possibility for free dialogue with other republics to discuss further cooperation, including political and economic union -- a political union including defense. (S)

We cannot agree with separatists who like to use the vote for independence as a vote for secession, for breaking with the union. Every state of the U.S. is sovereign, but we deal with the United States as a strong state. (S)

The President: Very true. The recognition of the aspirations of Ukrainians to be independent will pave the way to resolve these thorny issues standing in the way of political and economic reform. (S)

Mikhail, believe me, I am not trying to embarrass you or Yeltsin, and I'm not trying to mingle in your internal affairs. I want to make another point once again. I do not want to inadvertently play into the hands of radicals in Russia or Ukraine. (S)

I will closely consult with you and with the Russian Republic. Jim Baker will stay in close consultation with Eduard. We will work hand-in-hand to cooperate on borders, nuclear weapons, and center-republic relations. I just wanted to personally discuss this with you. (S)

President Gorbachev: Yesterday I had a meeting of the Political-Consultative Council. Yakovlev, Shevardnadze, Popov, Sobchak, Yavlinsky, Petrakov, Bakatin, and Yegor Yakovlev were there -- a well-seasoned team of reform-oriented people steeled by experience. (S)

The main question was that of political union. All of them spoke. We met from 3:00 to 9:00 at night. Everyone said that political union is vital, essential. Without it, the result could be a catastrophe for the Soviet Union, you, and for the world. (S)

All the members of the council agreed to do all possible to speed up that process, to urge politicians to move to signing of the treaty. I tell you so that you have an idea what we discuss among ourselves, how we all think. (S)

The President: I needn't tell you we have great respect for those names here. They are steeled by their trials, and that makes an impression on us. (S)

President Gorbachev: George, I highly value this call, and our direct, friendly conversation. I am deeply convinced that our cooperation and interaction with the U.S. Administration -- which

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is only possible with a renewed union -- is vitally necessary. It is very important for the entire world. (S)

The President: We are following events closely. I am always available, as is Jim Baker, any time. Now I'll try to call Yeltsin. (S)

President Gorbachev: OK, George. I shake your hand. I and my colleagues wish you and your associates the best. Heartfelt greetings from Raisa to you and Barbara. (U)

The President: I'm under a little pressure at home. I can't understand what you have been through, but people are piling on me, so I can understand a little of what you're experiencing. So, I wish you success. (S)

President Gorbachev: Thanks, and goodbye. (U)

The President: Goodbye. (U)

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