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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez of Spain

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Felipe Gonzalez, Prime Minister
Interpreter: Patricia Arizu
Notetaker: Barry Lowenkron, NSC Staff

DATE, TIME August 19, 1991, 1:51 - 2:02 p.m.
AND PLACE: Air Force One

The President: Felipe, how are you? This is George Bush. (U)

Prime Minister Gonzalez: I am fine. And you? (U)

The President: Doing fine. I'm very much concerned about events in the Soviet Union. Indeed, I'm about to land in Washington to talk about these matters. What's on your mind? The same thing?

~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Gonzalez: Yes, as a matter of fact, I was in the countryside myself. I've just returned to the city. We just held an emergency meeting. We think that events are going to turn into a coup plus an "involution." What consequences do you think will come out of this? ~~(S)~~

The President: It's a little early to say. I'm trying to calm down any discussion of military action while encouraging the return to reform. I think it's very early to say what will happen. Yeltsin has strong personal support and I'm hoping that the coup will be reversed, but I'm not sure how that can happen. What we are doing is saying that this is outside the legal process, that it is not a legal step and that we want to see the reforms continue. We are going to support Yeltsin's appeal for the return to the reforms but we are stopping short of trying to answer questions about whether we will take some military action. I think it's very important we not go overboard here. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Gonzalez: Yes, this is definitely not the time to try to find any course of military action or foster such a step. This is definitely the time for strong diplomatic action in all fora possible. George, I wanted to tell you that I myself have tried to talk directly to Gorbachev, although I knew it was practically impossible, but I think you should try to get in touch directly. ~~(S)~~

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The President: I think that's a good idea and may just try it when I'm in the White House. John Major also tried to reach Gorbachev and was told no lines were available. I expect I would get the same answer. But I think there is some good symbolism in trying to reach Gorbachev.

~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Gonzalez: Yes, I think that would be a very good gesture because we don't want to have the image of Gorbachev falling right now. We don't want them to think we don't feel anything as far as Gorbachev is concerned and we don't want to destroy his image. ~~(S)~~

The President: I agree with that. Yeltsin is expressing strong support for Gorbachev, all of which is good. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Gonzalez: Yes. Evidently he wants to recover Gorbachev's image because he wants to restore legality. ~~(S)~~

The President: This new vice president made some statement a little while ago, saying he hoped he would be able to work with Gorbachev in the future. He says Gorbachev is tired. We are confused as to what that means. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Gonzalez: Yes, I think that's what he tried to say, and I think it was a joke, in bad taste and rather cynical as far as remarks go. The last point I want to make is that we have to concentrate on supporting the East European countries. We have to show solidarity with them. ~~(S)~~

The President: No question about that. I will be talking to a couple of those leaders myself this afternoon or certainly by tomorrow morning. They are concerned. Major has already received a call from the President of Hungary. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Gonzalez: Yes, precisely. The European Community will meet tomorrow. We're going to issue a statement indicating respect for the process of reform and also for all the steps that have been adopted in the past. We also hope that there will be some statement of support for Gorbachev, at least so that he can recover his personal freedom. ~~(S)~~

The President: I hope so too, and we certainly agree with that. Let me discuss the idea of trying to call Gorbachev as an expression of that. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Gonzalez: That's fine, and let's try and keep in touch over the next few days. ~~(S)~~

The President: OK, let's do it and thanks for the call. We've just landed in DC. I'll go in and go to work. I hope to go back to Maine tomorrow. We have good communications there so if you want to give me a call, do so. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Gonzalez: OK, thank you very much. (U)

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The President: Goodbye my friend. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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