

Excerpts from Conversation with F. Mitterrand

October 29, 1990

The negotiations continued at the country residence of the French presidents in Rambouillet. In relation to this, F. Mitterrand said: "Allow me to express my satisfaction with the fact that I am receiving you in a different place than the Elysee Palace, which will allow you to look at France from a slightly different angle."

Gorbachev: This morning at 5:00 a telegram was received from E.M. Primakov. He reports that on Sunday, October 28th, he had conversations with almost all the Iraqi leadership, and then for an hour he had a one-on-one conversation with Saddam Hussein.

According to the conversation with the Iraqi president, he still has a glimmer of hope in the appearance of at least a small crack in the united front of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council.

Primakov told Hussein that we can hardly expect a "package solution" for the current situation in the region based on the rigid link between the settlement of the Kuwait crisis and the solution of other problems in this region.

It is interesting that at this stage of the conflict in the Persian Gulf, Hussein firmly states that, by being committed to the search for a peaceful way out of the current situation, he will at the same time not agree to any option involving his surrender. Moreover, he flatly rejects any options that could mean his public humiliation in connection with the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

It appears that Hussein has a kind of "idée fixe." He is convinced that a conspiracy against Iraq has emerged, with the aim, in particular, of eliminating the Iraqi president and physical violence against him. Hussein believes that the United States, Great Britain, and Israel, by insisting on the unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait, are actually striving for only one thing – weakening Iraq.

As follows from his reasoning, he sees the following three options for the possible development of events.

1. The development and implementation, under the guidance of the Soviet Union or some other influential state, of a full package of measures to resolve the crisis, including, in addition to the withdrawal of Iraqi troops, the solution of other problems of the region with a view to removing Iraq's concerns.
2. Convening, without any preconditions, an international conference to discuss not only the Kuwait problem, but also the entire range of issues in the Middle East.
3. Implementation of the "Arab option," which assumes the solution of all problems without any external pressure.

On the whole, as a result of the conversations in Baghdad, Primakov had the impression that the Iraqi president—although very slowly and painfully, but still—is beginning to move towards awareness of the need to leave Kuwait. But this process is really very painful.

Compared to the impression from Primakov's previous trip to Iraq, this time he felt that the Iraqi president, while still pressing on the Arab factor, paid more attention to the role of the Soviet Union and France.

So, now we can talk about the real chances of moving towards a political settlement. That said, I am convinced that the best bet would be to use the Arab factor.

Speaking about changes in Hussein's (Saddam's) behavior, one cannot at the same time close one's eyes to his attempts to gain time, use the tactic of baby steps, and split the unity of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council.

After Iraq, Primakov is going to Saudi Arabia.

...From Saudi Arabia, at the request of the Jordanian side, he will fly to Amman to meet with King Hussein.

Once again I emphasize a very significant point: there are signals of certain changes in the position of the Iraqi leadership towards a political settlement on the understanding that the "Arab option" would probably be the best.

Last night we talked about how Hussein would never agree with such an exit from the current situation that would look like his political and moral defeat. How should one proceed in light of this? It would, of course, be unrealistic to do something with the aim of removing S. Hussein from the political arena. In my opinion, preference should be given to seeking a settlement in the context of the Arab world.

Mitterrand: Do you think that an "Arab option" should include a significant role for the King of Saudi Arabia?

Gorbachev: Primakov's conversations in Baghdad indicate that Hussein is in favor of such an approach. That said, he very firmly rejects any options in which Mubarak would play a key role. An interesting detail—Hussein told Primakov that he could tell the King of Saudi Arabia the main points of their conversation. After thinking a little, he added: share our entire conversation with him.

In other words, some elements of real progress are beginning to emerge in Hussein's actions. Interestingly, he even offered his own text for a possible joint statement by Gorbachev and Mitterrand on the issue of hostages.

...He suggests that the presidents of the USSR and France appeal to the President of Iraq to cooperate on the hostage issue. The Soviet and French presidents would reaffirm their commitment to a political way of resolving the crisis in this zone of the Persian Gulf, as well as other problems of the entire region. The presidents, in his opinion, should speak in favor of a peaceful settlement of these problems with the participation of the world community and condemn any use of force or the threat of its use.

...When Primakov, reacting to the aforementioned proposal, said that one can hardly expect the adoption of such a statement by the presidents of the USSR and France, the Iraqi interlocutors said: we are ready to discuss any proposals from the Soviet and French presidents and are prepared to act in a spirit of openness.

Mitterrand: Talking about the position of the United States in this issue, one has to note the difference in the tone, style, and concrete solutions compared to our approaches. But on the essence of the issues, we do not have disagreements with the Americans. We believe that we should keep this course going forward, but of course without any sycophancy. If we are talking about tone and style, it should be reserved and calm.

Gorbachev: I would agree to this approach. But this is not for public knowledge.

Mitterrand: Not at all.

Gorbachev: Hussein is still trying to use the existing, long-standing special relationship between his country and the USSR, and France, to create a crack, a crevice in the general front of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council. I don't think this demonstrates his foresight.

You are right: if they now ask relevant questions at the press conference—and I myself will be questioned by the journalists in connection with Primakov's mission—then at the forefront of the matter we should put the commitment to joint action in accordance with the collectively adopted decisions of the U.N. Security Council regarding Iraqi aggression.

I received a letter from George [H.] W. Bush on the issue of the crisis in the Gulf, as well as a letter from Margaret Thatcher that was handed to me yesterday upon my return from the Elysee Palace. Thatcher wrote a short but tough letter. Bush and Thatcher, while not rejecting the significance of Primakov's mission, are at the same time speaking out in a spirit that [this mission] to some extent weakens the unity of the collective actions of the members of the U.N. Security Council.

This is absolutely not in line with reality. I always keep in mind that we cannot give Iraq any excuse to hope for the emergence of a split or any weakening of the united position of the U.N. Security Council in relation to [Iraqi] aggression against Kuwait. Primakov's mission is important in that it brought to light the existence of chances for moving towards a political settlement of the crisis, which I told you about yesterday. There can be no other way, as the only alternative to this is war.

You are right, we must show composure and the maximum sense of responsibility, to seriously analyze all the possibilities that allow us to exclude the military path. The military option would deal a blow to all positive processes in international relations and would cause a huge shock in the region, which as a reflected wave would hit all of us and would cause a deep rift between the developed countries and the Arab world. The people would not forgive this.

Once again, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Hussein's position is now not the same as it was only two or three weeks ago.

[...] We need to act decisively, consistently, to show unity, making every possible effort to avoid a backslide to a military solution.

Mitterrand: Such an option is hard to exclude *a priori*. We should not create dangerous illusions. As I said yesterday, war is inevitable if we are not able to break Hussein's will and if Bush and Thatcher do not want to listen to anything.

[...] In my view, we have to define a short-term and a long-term plans.

The long-term perspective must involve a consideration and resolution of the entire complex of problems of the Near and Middle East, which would be the culmination of the entire process of settlement. This is necessary in order for the Arabs to have a hope that would motivate their actions. Naturally, it does not mean that we will try to deceive them. [...] As far as the short-term perspective is concerned, difficulties emerge with our allies. We completely agree with them about the need to free the hostages and all of Kuwait, on which the Americans in particular insist, but I have doubts regarding whether it is expedient to speak in favor of restoration of the Kuwaiti ruling dynasty. [...]

Therefore, I think we should introduce a temporal dimension in our position. [...] Kuwait would be transferred to the new authorities not from Iraq but, let's say, from the United Nations. The starting negotiations would focus on, in particular, possible concessions to Iraq,

including, among others, access to the Persian Gulf, oil prospecting, and others. This way, Hussein's vanity would be assuaged. [...] In any case, Hussein should have hope for achieving a compromise on the territorial issue. We are not there yet. However, it is necessary that he could hope for approximately such an outcome. Otherwise, the use of force would be unavoidable.

[...] I personally cannot see any other plan. In my view, any other approach will lead to war.

Unfortunately, neither the United States nor Great Britain is willing to agree with the need for a transitional phase in the resolution of the Kuwaiti issue. However, I have not yet talked to them about it. [...] With great concern, I recently notice statements, which have become more frequent in the United States, to the effect that from their point of view, Article 51 of the U.N. Charter is sufficient in order to use force, without engaging the U.N. Security Council. This article stipulates the right of every state to "individual or collective self-defense," i.e. to a legitimate self-defense and to appeal to another state for these purposes. In this concrete case, it could be interpreted as the use of force by the United States in response to a request from Saudi Arabia. It turns out that the United States, on their own, without recourse to the U.N. Security Council, could decide to start the war. If one could put it this way, they become the "masters of war."

Gorbachev: [...]Where do our differences with the U.S. and U.K. start? As shown in the letters of Bush and Thatcher that I mentioned, we are united in our assessment of the situation. However, they consider any resolution that would allow Hussein to save face and avoid humiliation unacceptable. It follows that [only] two options remain: to try to remove Hussein from the political arena, which, in my opinion, is unrealistic for a number of reasons, or to take the path of war. We must face the truth—if we don't give Hussein anything, he will go to extremes.

Therefore, while continuing to communicate our line of reasoning to Hussein, while cautioning him against the policy of provoking the use of force, it is necessary at the same time to work with our partners in the spirit that we are now talking with you about. Our partners are starting to get nervous, to lose their composure—I think that this is wrong. Because the efforts of our actions have already allowed us to win the first battle. We have maintained our unity in the face of this lawless act. Our steps have already begun to produce definite results and to influence Hussein's position.

It is also necessary to continue to act in this vein, given that the chances of a political settlement have begun to emerge, although for now these chances are extremely vague. We must communicate to our partners in the Security Council the idea of the need to follow this particular line. Hussein may have to be convinced that he has very little time left, that events may take the worst path for him, that he should not hope for the success of his maneuvers, but to exercise realism and a desire for a political settlement.

If we proceed from the possibility of a political settlement, then it seems to me that your reflections on the short-term and long-term plans are correct. It is necessary to look for various political methods and mechanisms for a settlement. However, the most realistic appears to be the involvement of Arab organizations. A meeting of Arab countries could formulate their ideas and demands, addressed to Hussein, then all problems would be solved more easily—both the issue of the fate of Kuwait and the issue of restoring government there, although it is not yet clear how

this process will go, whether the controversial issues will be resolved amongst the Arabs themselves. Such a path would be the most painless, it would look like an inter-Arab settlement.

However, there is currently no agreement among the members of the U.N. Security Council—and even among its permanent members—regarding such a formula. Some of them consider it unacceptable. In this regard, it would be possible, after pondering the results of our conversations with you, to send a letter to all the permanent members of the Security Council and speak in favor of the use of the Arab factor as the most viable option for a settlement. If there is a general mutual understanding on this issue, then the Arabs in their circle, so to speak, in their family, could discuss the existing problems and present their demands to Hussein. If there is no unity within the Security Council regarding this option then the Arab countries are unlikely to meet for a joint discussion of the crisis.

If we choose a different course of action, say, each one individually would approach the Arabs, then they, in turn, would begin consultations with other members of the U.N. Security Council, including the U.S. and Great Britain, and there would be inconsistency, discord. Therefore, first of all, we need to come to an agreement among ourselves (that is, in the Security Council).

Mitterrand: I fully agree with you. Now we could invite minister of foreign affairs and also the prime minister of France and continue our conversation with them.

[The conversation continued with the prime minister of France and ministers of foreign affairs E. A. Shevardnadze and R. Dumas]

Gorbachev: [...] At the press-conference we could start with the fact that we have analyzed in depth the whole range of problems of this vast region. Like you, I believe that we should say that in our broad understanding it is necessary to strictly, consistently, and firmly adhere to the decisions collectively adopted by the U.N. Security Council. On this issue, we have complete clarity with the French president, and there are no misunderstandings or disagreements.

It seems important to me that an appeal be expressed from Paris to our partners in the U.N. Security Council, as well as to the entire world community, with a firm call for action towards a political resolution of the crisis in the Persian Gulf. This should also be recorded as our position. In this case, other opportunities will open up. So far, all measures taken have been focused specifically towards a political settlement. Indeed, even the presence of the U.S. and other countries' troops was intended to reach a political solution, to restore justice.

We found, with the French president, that there are two main trends. Our partners on the U.N. Security Council are increasingly discussing—even while reaffirming their commitment to a political resolution—a military option as the only possible one under Hussein's current position. Some Arab countries are also pushing towards such an option, the very ones that at one time pushed the United States to hastily, without sufficient analysis, send troops into the Persian Gulf. They had assured Bush that the presence of their troops there would be necessary for 3-4 weeks. But it's already been 3 months.

Another tendency proceeds from the premise that, currently in Baghdad, under the pressure of circumstances, signs are beginning to appear indicating that the Iraqi leadership is gradually coming to more realistic assessments and is beginning to think about moving towards a

political solution. I am convinced that we must use the existing chances for a peaceful way out of the crisis. At the same time, of course, I fully agree with the president of France that we must strongly reaffirm our commitment to the collective decisions of the U.N. Security Council. It should be clear that no one can shatter our unity, make a split in it, force us to retreat or forgo our cooperation.

I think it important to review one idea at the meeting with the journalists, which the president of France also spoke about. This is a formula that would allow Hussein to save face in the framework of a political settlement, which primarily means the engagement of the “Arab factor.” Hussein would go for such an option more readily, would agree to discuss issues related to Kuwait and other disputes, but also the guarantees as well. In doing so, I will again emphasize the importance of the cooperation of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council. During our communications with Baghdad, we must primarily strive to convey to him the idea that the time limit has been exhausted.

... We will each speak from our side and we will respond to questions...

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From a conversation with Prime Minister of France M. Rocard.

October 29, 1990.

Gorbachev: If we take steps towards Israel, then from its side we often see not politics, but some kind of zigzagging.

Rocard: Today I am meeting with Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs D. Levi, who is arriving in France. As always, conversations with him will not be easy. You probably also have difficulties with Israel. [...]

Just now, in the plenary part of the conversation, when talking about the prospects of settlement in the region of the Persian Gulf and around it, you mentioned the word “guarantees.” I personally believe that this term is the key. Do you apply this notion to the problem of armaments in the Middle East?

Gorbachev: ... Yes, taking into account the level of accumulated weapons in this region, including nuclear weapons. By the way, it is precisely this moment that particularly concerned Thatcher. Moreover, her concerns refer not only to the current state of affairs, but also to the more distant future.

[...] I will add that while we assess the situation in the Persian Gulf in a roughly similar way to Thatcher, we draw different conclusions from this assessment. You know the position of the USSR and I just presented it in conversations with President Mitterrand. Thatcher still believes that Iraq must be crushed. But this will mean a war with all its attendant tragic consequences.

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Joint Press-Conference of M.S. Gorbachev and F. Mitterrand

October 29, 1990

The press-conference took place at the country residence of the president of France in Rambouillet after the signing of the Treaty on Agreement and Cooperation between the USSR and the Republic of France.

At the start of the press-conference, **F. Mitterrand** spoke about the accomplished work. In particular, he said: [...] What kind of agreements have been signed? A protocol on financial agreement signed by Mr. Voronin and Mr. Beregovoy. The French government, in short, provides the USSR with financial assistance in the amount of 5 billion francs. A program of economic, industrial, and scientific-technical cooperation between the two countries for the period 1991-1995. This program was signed from the French side by Mr. Foru and from the Soviet side by Mr. Voronin. The areas affecting it are energy, petrochemicals, industry, agricultural food programs, railway and road transport, electronics, informatics, communications, television, high-definition television, and environmental protection. Another agreement between our two governments concerns cooperation in the areas of employment, labor, and occupational training. It was signed from the Soviet side by Mr. Shcherbakov and from the French side by Mr. Soissons. The goal is professional training for a competitive labor market, that is, training specialists on issues relating to employment, human resources, and trade union personnel.

Another protocol of cooperation is between enterprises of the French and Soviet public sectors. On the Soviet side, it was signed by Mr. Voronin, by the French it was signed by Mr. Foru. It provides for the establishment of links of cooperation between state enterprises of the two countries, for example, between the Ministry of Energy and Electrification of the Soviet Union and "Electricite de France," for professional training and the exchange of trainees. An agreement between the National Center for scientific Research and the USSR Academy of Sciences was signed on the Soviet side by Mr. Marchuk and on the French side by Mr. Kurilski. The goal is to develop joint research programs, information exchanges, collaboration between laboratories, and international programs in the field of scientific cooperation.

And finally, a little while ago, just a moment ago, Mr. Gorbachev and I, as well as the prime minister of France and the foreign ministers of the two states, signed the Treaty of Agreement and Cooperation. This treaty acquires special significance due to the scope of the problems raised, but it also has a special aspect because such an agreement has not been signed for many years ... Everything that I have said marks a new stage in relations between the Soviet Union and France, the significance and level of which and prospects for the future please us greatly. Thank you, Mr. President, would you like to say a few words now?

M.S. Gorbachev. You (*turning to F. Mitterrand*) made such a good introduction that it made my task much easier. To a large extent I could and can subscribe to what Mr. President Francois Mitterrand said. Yes, indeed, we have met the time limit that was allocated for this meeting,

because we worked a lot the day before, which allowed us, perhaps for the first time in our cooperation, to come out with such major documents. Mr. President concluded the report in assessing the signing of the Treaty on Agreements and Cooperation as a major event in our relations, at least over the past ten years. I want to start with this and emphasize that we have logically come to such a document. Generally speaking, if we go back a little in history, then we must say that we had political declarations of a similar nature. But by no means always did they then conceive policy and remain stable reference points. In this particular case, moving in recent years to ensure our reaching this, frankly speaking, courageous document, we, if you like, have shown wisdom, caution, and balance. This is a document that is extremely promising for cooperation between our peoples and our states. I fully share the high rating that Mr. President has given it.

During the time that I have been here, we have been able to conduct at least four conversations. Indeed, we spoke continuously; at the same time there were negotiations between the foreign ministers and all the members of the delegation. At the final stage before coming here, a lot of work was also done. And the fact that this was done in a short time also reflects a new level of cooperation, a new level of mutual understanding between the leaderships of the two countries, which allows us to effectively discuss the major issues and come up with results, which then are developed into corresponding agreements.

Mr. Francois Mitterrand named the themes to which we devoted our conversations. I would say, confirming his information: yes, in the first place we addressed the issue or the problem that concerns the global transformation, which has placed very high demands on world politics and world politicians. [...]

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