

**Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and
Francois Mitterrand
January 18, 1991
[excerpt]**

Gorbachev: Good morning, Mr. President. My heartfelt greetings to you.

Mitterrand: [...] As far as France is concerned, we are fulfilling our allied obligations with a single goal: so that when Kuwait is liberated, the process of restoring peace can begin in this region.

Of course, not everything is so simple. Last night the crisis engulfed Israel as well.

Gorbachev: I was thinking a lot before our conversation. In my view, it is precisely the Soviet Union and France, you personally, Mr. President, we together have done more than others to resolve this conflict by political means.

Mitterrand: You are right.

Gorbachev: But it was not possible to avoid military actions in the final stage. I am not saying that in a way to suggest that we are changing our principled positions, our assessment of the aggression. We are not talking about that [...]

Events are entering a new phase. Yesterday the Hussein regime demonstrated its ambitions, showed an unwillingness to compromise, and issued threats to everybody and especially to the Americans. Today it has suffered a political defeat. Great damage was inflicted on its defensive and even industrial potential. Iraq today is not what it used to be. [...] Now the conflict is entering its second phase. Continuation of the bombing would mean strikes against the population. Ground forces are entering the stage, which will lead to the slaughter of American and other soldiers, mainly Arab [soldiers].

Mitterrand: Yes.

Gorbachev: This conflict could turn out in such a way that would lead to the extermination of a people, of the country. The situation would become absurd. We would be in contradiction with our own wider goals.

Today the Soviet ambassador in Baghdad will ask Hussein a question on my behalf: "If there is a pause in military action, are you ready to announce a withdrawal from Kuwait?"

Mitterrand: This idea is of capital importance.

Gorbachev: Currently I am awaiting Hussein's answer. [...]

If we can stop the situation now, then we can say the following: we exhibited unity, a lesson was taught; we were able to avoid heavy loss of life.

Mitterrand: Yes. [...] I think that currently there is sufficient pressure on Israel to prevent it from entering the conflict. [Israel] is being informed that launching missile strikes in response, essentially, would not make a substantial contribution to the military operations already underway. At the same time, it would have quite negative political and psychological consequences.

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Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive.]