

**Record of the Main Content of Conversation between Gorbachev and Bush, Paris
November 19, 1990**

[...]

Bush: I think that the decision to award you the Nobel Peace Prize, which was received very warmly in the United States, also represents an expression of confidence that you would be able to find answers to all the hard questions that you are faced with.

[...] You are living through a difficult time. Of course, I don't want to interfere in your internal affairs in any way, but let me say this: we will try to do all we can to help you in this difficult cause.

Gorbachev: Thank you. You are right when you say that we are living through a difficult time. But it cannot be otherwise, if we are really changing, implementing cardinal transformation of our society. There is no road back, notwithstanding all the problems and underwater rocks that we discovered. I constantly say to my colleagues and to our citizens: we should look for answers to our problems by moving forward, not by casting backward glances.

However, the rate of transformation, the speed of the movement, the priorities--are a different issue. Here one has to think. Each country has its own priorities, and even each of our republics differs from the others, has its own distinctive features. But we all must move forward, in the understanding that we don't have much time. Henceforth--the need for decisive actions.

What is the utmost concern of our society right now? First of all it is instability--economic, political, and in the interethnic sphere. That is why people more and more express themselves in favor of stability, for decisive actions of the authorities, for strengthening of the government, so that we do not lose everything that we achieved in the years of perestroika and the democratic reforms.

That is why to some extent, sometimes, we have to use methods resembling harsh administrative measures, so that we do not allow the unfolding processes to turn to chaos. Everybody had to turn to such methods at the sharp turns of history, including President Roosevelt.

How did events unfold recently? I was working on measures for transition to market economy, stabilization of monetary-financial sphere, speeding up the discussions of the union treaty and restructuring of the power structures. But after the two-week parliamentary recess for the anniversary of the revolution, the deputies came back from their electoral districts, where constituents gave them some good thrashing, and immediately they demanded to change the agenda of the Supreme Soviet, and to discuss the issue of the situation in the country. They stated that they wanted to hear the President, and I agreed to speak to them on the next day.

My testimony contained an assessment of the situation and proposals about how to move forward. The deputies agreed with my assessment, but not quite with the proposals. They saw them as insufficient. After listening to them for the whole day, I sensed that people wanted more decisive, even harsh, steps, without waiting for the new union treaty or other decisions. I already had ideas about what specifically had to be done, but I thought I would introduce them a bit later. But there I saw that I had to

propose them now; that I could not wait. I worked all night on my speech, where I presented eight points, which we need to implement urgently.

One hundred fifty people signed up to speak. You could feel great tension in the room. I asked for the floor. The room fell silent. After I gave a short speech, the room was silent at first, and then broke in applause.

Bush: We saw it on television. It made a very good impression. What will happen now?

Gorbachev: We will be moving in the same direction as we did before, but we will carry out serious organizational changes. In essence, we are talking about presidential rule, a presidential system, where executive power will be directly under the President's control. New structures will be created--economic, political, oversight--to ensure this.

Bush: And what would Yeltsin's place in this [system] be? Would it strengthen your position in relation to the Russian republic?

Gorbachev: You know, in our society, people are mainly in favor of political stabilization; they reject those who rock the boat. And one more thing--in all the republics people speak in favor of the union more and more decisively. And people raise the question--what is preventing cooperation between Gorbachev and Yeltsin? I answer them honestly--nothing is preventing it. There is a great objective need for such cooperation now. People tell us--if you cannot agree [with each other], you are not good for anything.

Yeltsin built his reputation on negativity. People used to say--good job, he criticizes Gorbachev himself. However, now he has power, he has authority and, accordingly, responsibilities. And people are asking: what has changed? And he continues to blame the Center for all the problems.

Bush: As if he does not have to do anything himself.

Gorbachev: I think, the society must sort it out. The strengthening of the presidential power is intended for stabilization of the situation in the country and circumscribing the opportunities for destructive forces. The new government will comprise reasonable, capable people regardless of any external circumstances. I will try to include him [Yeltsin] in this process. Unfortunately, around him, and also in the Moscow City Soviet and in Leningrad City Soviet, there are many windbags, who are not capable of doing anything. If not for the Center's assistance, Moscow and Leningrad would be in trouble.

Bush: For us it is hard to understand. We have a clear division of powers between the center and the states. We understand what you want to achieve: to preserve order and unity, which are necessary for the republics. And when that man sends his foreign minister and trade delegations everywhere, announcing that he couldn't care less about the Center, we just simply do not understand that.

Gorbachev: I told him that he must state clearly his position regarding the preservation of our Union. He then said that he had already spoken in that regard. But I said that such a statement was necessary, and finally he agreed and made an appropriate statement. But double morality is unacceptable. You cannot be saying one thing and doing another thing. I think that those structural changes that we will implement will force him to define his position faster: either we work together or one will have to leave.

And that's what's interesting: as soon as I raised the issue of order and discipline in my speech, literally on the next day Moscow stores started to fill up. This means that there were manipulations, actions by the mafia. Now we will deal with it seriously.

As soon as we get home, we intend to publish the draft of the Union Treaty, which will delineate clearly the powers of the Center and the republics.

Bush: The text of the speech prepared for me for this conference included references to Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. However, after I read the text, I left out those references. I understood that this could put you in an awkward situation.

As you know, the United States had never recognized inclusion of those republics into the USSR. And when you talk about preservation of the Union, I recall Camp David where we discussed this question. You said then that your Constitution provides for a possibility of an orderly transition to independence for republics. And although I did not mention this issue in my speech, I hope that you understand that we have many people of Baltic origin in the United States and we hope that you will be able to ensure orderly progress in the process of self-determination. I repeat, I understood your problems and I did not want to add to them from outside. But we hope that it would be possible to find a way, which would allow [them] to carry out such a process of self-determination. What do you think about this?

Gorbachev: Lately we have been consulting often and extensively about the Union treaty. At the same time, we started certain processes with the Baltics, and the current situation there is quite interesting. The situation there has worsened lately. The positions of the existing authorities are in danger. In Latvia and Lithuania the press launched a campaign of criticism. They sharply criticize Landsbergis, especially after he stated that he wants to get back his father's property. Peasants, workers, leading representatives of intelligentsia express sharp disapproval. The president of the republican Academy of Sciences spoke out recently.

People tell the authorities: it was better under the communists--and you are scroungers, self-seekers, you are good for nothing, just grabbing cars, dachas and other things. Meanwhile, even worse extremists, people who collaborated with Hitler in their time, and their children are lurking behind the backs of the present authorities. All in all, we have a lot of information that the situation there is close to an explosion.

Bush: But isn't it a fact that practically the entire population there is in favor of independence? Or, let's put it this way--that the majority would like to see their republics independent sooner or later?

Gorbachev: Not in a single republic does the leadership want to hold a referendum on this issue. Not even in Lithuania, where 80% of the population is Lithuanian.

Bush: You mean they are not confident that everybody would support them?

Gorbachev: Yes. We will publish the draft of the Union treaty, and when the treaty is ready, the republics will sign it. And then we will start a “divorce procedure” with those who will not sign.

Bush: In the framework of your Constitution?

Gorbachev: Precisely.

Bush: Now I suggest we turn to the most difficult, festering issue: the situation in the Persian Gulf. Jim Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze have been discussing this problem in depth. You graciously received the Secretary of State in Moscow. We take your position very seriously. I understand your words that we need prudence, patience and restraint.

A couple of days ago, when I was Chancellor Kohl’s guest, I visited his native town, where you were recently. And then I visited one of our military bases and looked into the eyes of our boys, who are young enough to be our kids or grandkids. And I thought: how I wish they did not have to go into battle. I think that you too, when you took office, had the same feeling when you looked at the young Soviet soldiers.

I need your help on this issue. We have to get a U.N. resolution passed that would authorize the necessary measures, namely the use of force, in order to persuade Saddam Hussein that he must fulfill the demands of the United Nations. Frankly speaking, I do not see any other way to persuade him that he must do what the entire world demands of him.

We are dealing with a hard, unpredictable person. In terms of cruelty, he is right up there with Hitler. You know, I got in trouble for comparing him to Hitler. But looking at it, even Hitler did not block foreign embassies and did not use people as human shields. And when many American Jews said to me that one cannot compare Saddam to a person who was guilty of mass extermination of an entire nation, I responded that today they surrounded the American Embassy, tomorrow it might be somebody else’s [embassy], not even mentioning the hostages--here he does not show mercy to any country.

I want you to know: in the United States right now the mood on this issue is not completely clear-cut. But if you look at the opinion polls, half of those who do not approve of my actions, believe that I should have attacked earlier. You add to those the 60% of Americans who support me, and you see solid support.

But I do not want to use force. However, I came to the conclusion that such a resolution is necessary. And thinking about how we want to build our relationship in the future, I believe that your support would serve as strong proof of our partnership.

This is why I am asking you to help me. And not even me so much--who knows, in two years, somebody else could become President. I am asking you to help do what is

just. If you cannot give me your final answer right away, I would be prepared to understand you, but still, please keep in mind that your answer is extremely important for us.

Our two countries were opponents, but today we are working together. If you cannot help me in this case, we will still interact. But I am asking you to help [us] send this signal to Saddam. We believe that this would be sufficient to make Saddam do everything that is required of him.

I wanted to talk about this to you in private, not in the presence of our colleagues, for two reasons: to pour out my heart to you and to avoid putting you in a situation where you would have to give a final answer right now.

Gorbachev: I have thought it all over--our conversation with Baker, and your letter, Mr. President. This moment is exceptionally important not just for both of us, but also for everything that we started to do in the world. If we do not prove now that we are capable, at this new stage of global development, of dealing with this kind of problem, it would mean that what we started does not mean all that much. If you and I are not capable to stop aggression, annexation, blatant violation of international law, it means that we are not doing what we should. No, we must prove the opposite, and that means that we must find a solution to this problem. This is first and most important.

Second. Due to the choice that we made in the Soviet Union (and I believe that you made a similar choice in the United States), we do not want to see the United States and its President in a difficult, critical situation. And if in this situation we part our ways, take separate roads, that would mean that we have not achieved much in our relations. Although, of course, in the future, we will probably have differences, and then we will have to sit down at a table and discuss them. But in this case, I am convinced, we must stay together with you.

In my heart of hearts, probably just like you, I very much want to avoid blood, avoid losses, avoid American boys being killed, because such bloodshed would be a blow against the U.S. President. And it would also be very bad for regular Arabs. That is why we prefer decisively that this settlement should be achieved without spilling blood. And I start from the assumption that you are also in favor of this. Because if the war starts, it could be much worse than Vietnam.

This is the dilemma that we must resolve. On the one hand--to try to avoid a military solution. On the other--to undertake one more step that would increase the pressure on Saddam Hussein.

When I was talking with Jim in Moscow, I implored him not to take the road of Article 51 of the U.N. Charter. We have to determine clearly that we would be acting strictly with the U.N. framework. This is very important.

Maybe for some part of the U.S. public opinion, this is not so clear. They may say why bother with the United Nations, with the Security Council, while Saddam Hussein is getting more insolent and is treating the United States like an insignificant state that can be forced to its knees. But I think that the position that you and I took is the right and responsible position.

Thus, after comprehensive thinking and analysis, we came to the conclusion that we should agree to passing of a U.N. Security Council resolution. We believe that this should be a two-tier resolution, so to say, that it should combine your proposal and mine.

The first part should contain essentially an ultimatum to Iraq to fulfill the U.N. resolutions. But we will give him a deadline, give him one last chance to change his mind. In the second part, it will say that in case this requirement is not fulfilled, all appropriate measures could be taken to restore justice.

We agree that such a resolution should be passed while you still hold the chairmanship of the Security Council.

In addition, we believe that during the period when the ultimatum is in force, we need to undertake a number of steps. I think our countries should find a possibility to meet with the Iraqi leadership at some level, for example at the level of Foreign Ministers, and present them with our demands: you must leave Kuwait, free the people, otherwise the mechanism will be put into force, which would truly put you on your knees. Another option [would be] to send Peres de Quellar with this message, as it was done during the Iran-Iraq war. However, this option appears to be weaker than the direct bilateral approach.

Bush: This bilateral approach, seems to me, has big advantages. What do you think should the term of the ultimatum be?

Gorbachev: Let us say, until the middle of January. After that, it would be permitted to use all appropriate means, and there would be no need for passing one more resolution. This would create a bridge to further actions, and this decision would be made while the United States still holds the chairmanship of the Security Council.

About China's position. We see that the Chinese are starting to maneuver. However, I do not think that they would veto the proposed resolution.

Bush: I think that if you and I take this approach, then the Chinese will follow us. You know that we have problems with the Chinese, but we start from the assumption that the Chinese do not want to be in isolation.

Gorbachev: It seems to me that you should lift the sanctions against China.

Bush: There are some legal problems here. I vetoed the congressional resolutions directed against China. And so far, I was able to defend my position. In general, I agree with you, but in our crazy system ...

Gorbachev: Now not only yours.

Bush: In any case, if you are talking with the Chinese, tell them that our administration is persistently aspiring to normalize relations. Cooperation in the U.N. framework will allow us to do even more in this direction.

I highly appreciate the position that you presented. I am very happy that we are coming to an agreement. We will act tactfully so that we can take your considerations into account as we develop the draft resolution. Such a resolution, formulated appropriately, will become a powerful signal and will allow us to save people's lives, lives of American soldiers. I do not want war.

Gorbachev: I think that such a two-tier resolution, in combination with our additional steps, will force Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait. As far as the actual language is concerned, I think that we should not use the words “military force” in the resolution. And Shevardnadze and Baker should discuss which concrete steps we would undertake so that we would not be just sitting there with our hands in our laps. Besides, I think we should restrain all kinds of travelers and make sure the Iraqis understand that they will have to deal only with those who adopted the U.N. resolutions.

Bush: As far as military force is concerned, it must be clear from the formulation that it is not excluded. To tell you the truth, I am not a lawyer and I do not understand clearly what is the difference between the words “necessary” and “appropriate” measures.

Gorbachev: Formulations should be such that Saddam would understand everything.

Bush: Thank you, I am very grateful [to you] for your position. What are we going to tell the press?

Gorbachev: I think that first of all, we should confirm our line based on principle. The aggression must be repelled, and we intend to achieve this, acting within the framework of the United Nations, of its Security Council.

Bush: What are we going to say specifically about our conversation?

Gorbachev: We carried out a very serious exchange of opinions, analyzed the situation and came to the conclusion that our common approach has been and remains correct. We agreed that we should keep working together in the future, working within the framework of the U.N. Security Council in such a way that the aggressor does not get any leniency or reward. We came to the conclusion that in the nearest future, the situation should be addressed again in the framework of the U.N. Security Council. And we don't have to mention the resolution yet.

Bush: I agree.

I would like to say a couple of words about the conversation that you had with Jim Baker in Moscow. As far as I understand, you might soon need urgent assistance with food products and medicines. I am fully and wholeheartedly in favor of providing such assistance. I want you to know this. If need arises, we will be ready to act.

Gorbachev: Thank you, Mr. President.

Bush: Now I think we can join our colleagues, tell them about the results of our conversation and end this evening with a friendly dinner.

[Source: Gorbachev Foundation Archive, Fond 1, opis 1. Published in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 23, p. 176-181. Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya.]