

Excerpts from Record of Conversation between M.S. Gorbachev and J. Baker.

November 8, 1990, Moscow

Gorbachev: Greetings to you, Mr. Secretary of State. I am welcoming you as a friend. Of course we are now deeply immersed in our own affairs. I am constantly thinking about our affairs, looking for ways to solve our problems, and ways, which would be based on our chosen approach, that would move us forward and not backward. And at the same time, I often catch myself constantly thinking about what is happening in the United States, what President Bush and his closest allies are doing. We feel our co-belonging with you, I would even say our responsibility for the success of your administration. I am not going to develop this thought any further, I hope that it did not surprise you.

We are firmly determined—and I hope you will see it yourself—to not only preserve and protect our relations but also to move them forward. Everything that we aspire to achieve in our country, naturally, is in our national interest, but we are deeply convinced that it is also in the national interest of the United States. Moving closer together, closer cooperation between our two countries, governments and peoples in the interest of positive changes in the entire world—this is our contribution to the global civilization. This consideration lies at the basis of everything we are doing and are going to be doing in our relations with the United States. You should not have any doubt about it. Whatever transpires in your country or in our country, we want to act and to come to agreements in such a way that we stand together with you, next to you. Maybe this is the most important choice that we have made.

There is a small part of our people who still harbor certain doubts regarding our line toward cooperation with the United States. Some people believe that two such giants as the USSR and the USA will necessarily part ways again. Even during the demonstration in Red Square we saw the following slogans: in all the years of the Cold War, the United States could not obtain the things that Gorbachev and his policy gifted them in recent years. And, they say, the West gave Gorbachev the Nobel Prize for the destruction of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. And in the same sentence, after a comma, so to say, they also criticize Shevardnadze. But this is not the prevailing opinion. In general, the people's opinion is different. Our people are in favor of cooperation with the United States, people are engaging in this process more and more.

We are talking about a turn of a historic scale. We are not surprised that there are different assessments in the United States as well. Some are saying that Gorbachev's time has already passed and that you should look at other people. What can we say, here also some people are nervous, even supporters of perestroika among them.

[...]

Baker: Thank you. I really appreciate that you informed me about what is happening in your country and I will make sure that the president is informed about it immediately.

I understand very well what you said about the thin line that separates freedom of speech and democracy from anarchy and also from repressions. From the very first days, when we supported your initiatives, we understood how difficult it was for you to find the right approach in this situation. We also understood that the time would come when you would have to make a very difficult choice. But the president and I see very clearly that you, Eduard Shevardnadze, and your colleagues are serious people who genuinely want changes. And having determined that, we took your side decisively.

We are very happy that you were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. You deserved it. You remember, when we met last time, I told you that you and your supporters exhibit great courage, the courage of political leaders. It is not easy to turn a country in a new direction after 70 years of different politics and economics. I want to say that when you speak about co-belonging with our administration, we respond with the same. I am never tired of repeating that it is only thanks to the changes in our relations that new approaches in international affairs are becoming possible. Both you and we are interested in the success of your and our efforts. I spoke today with Shevardnadze about the fact that for the first time the prospect of a genuine United Nations has emerged, as its founders envisioned it. This is also thanks to the changes started by you. This is why we are rooting for you, wishing you success. And you should not think that we are not being criticized for it in the United States. I showed my colleague some headlines from our newspapers. But I repeat: we have made up our mind. You are implementing a historic turn and moving firmly on this road. We noted that the counter-demonstrations that took place yesterday did not gather much support, and were quite listless.

We are full of decisiveness about moving our relations further forward. This corresponds to my deep personal convictions. Today I told Eduard that I was greatly influenced by a Russian person who left Russia after the revolution, in my childhood. He was almost like a father to me. My best memories about his kindness and intelligence are still with me. Today we enjoy a genuinely trusting relationship, which allow us to discuss the most sensitive aspects of the current crisis. We share our information, our assessments, and our analysis with you. This is one more proof of how we want to construct our relations.

We, on our part, are trying to do some things to help you. Eduard passed on your gratitude for our efforts to ensure financial assistance from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. We were very happy that we were able to help you in that way. We are currently unable to help you in a more direct form because of the existing legislation.

I know that E.A. Shevardnadze told you about our conversation, about our plans. I want to tell you that we are not making this choice with a light heart. We fully understand that it is connected to a certain risk for President Bush. At the same time, we very firmly believe that here we are talking about an exceptionally important principle, and that the future development of the international community will depend on our action or inaction.

We continue to hope for a peaceful, political resolution to this crisis. At the same time we are convinced that the madman with whom we have to deal will leave Kuwait only if he is convinced that we are serious and decisive. We are not sure that time is on our side. Saddam Hussein is skillful and cruel in his manipulation of public opinion, using visits of various envoys to Bagdad and promising to free the hostages. Now he is inviting several members of the U.S. Congress, stating that if the congressmen come to Bagdad and let him be photographed with them, then he will free a certain number of people. His approach is to drive wedges [to split the coalition].

Gorbachev: We noticed that you are managing to keep your cool in this situation. In contrast to Mrs. Thatcher, for example, who, in my view is starting to cross the line from rationality to emotions.

Baker: This is because we know whose casualties there will be in this conflict. We thought about it a lot and I am not carrying out my mission with an easy heart.

We believe that certain chances for settlement exist only if we work together in adopting a U.N. Security Council resolution, which in a general way would sanction the use of all means necessary for ensuring implementation of all U.N. resolutions adopted earlier, and if, along with that, there is an augmentation of force by the United States and other countries in the region. In this way Saddam Hussein will be completely clear that if does not leave then we have enough will in order to choose the option of using force.

Naturally, I will understand the position of the Soviet Union if you come to the conclusion that you cannot take part in our action. You are now carrying out a great transformation and the experience of Afghanistan is still fresh in your memory. And yet, I cannot stop thinking that if the use of force becomes necessary, the image of Americans and Russians fighting side by side (even if your participation is limited to a small unit) would made a very strong impression. However, regardless of whether you can or cannot agree to this, we wholeheartedly hope that you would find it possible to agree to the plan of actions that I presented to Shevardnadze.

I came to you precisely now because only three weeks are left of our chairmanship of the U.N. Security Council. After that the chairmanship will switch to Yemen, Zimbabwe, and Cuba, and then there will be very little chance that we will be able to pull off the proposed draft resolution, even if we draft it with very general wording. We believe that if such a resolution is adopted, then Saddam would move his troops

out, while leaving them in the northern sector and on the island of Bubiyan. But we have to keep in mind another possibility as well—i.e. that he would refuse to do it. In this case, we have to account for the fact that after February 1 realization of the military option becomes impossible because of the rainy season, Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to the holy sites. In that case the opportunity arises again only in the fall of 1991. We will not be able to maintain a sufficient number of troops in the region for such a long time. We will have to withdraw at least part of them and then it would become clear to the whole world that the U.N. resolutions are not being carried out and that the aggressor is being rewarded for the aggression.

We are willing to give two more months for the sanctions to work. Altogether, we would be giving them five months. Therefore, it is clear that we are not proposing any kind of premature or reckless actions. I have to say that there are many people in the American government who are saying: if you act within the U.N. framework, you will just get bogged down in procedural arguments, your hands and feet will be tied. Therefore, they are saying, we should act on the basis of Article 51 of the U.N. Charter. We already had this polemic in our government when we discussed how to ensure implantation of sanctions on the high seas. I called Eduard two or three times a day from Wyoming. In those days there was a lot of pressure on the president not to deal with the United Nations but to act on the basis of Article 51 instead. But we did not choose that approach and the president believes that we made the right choice. For the same reason, he sent me on this trip with instructions to figure out whether we can still act further within the U.N. framework.

The resolution that we are proposing will not stipulate an automatic use of force. But I agree with E.A. Shevardnadze's statement that after January 1, if Saddam does not leave Kuwait, we will have to act because otherwise people will lose their respect for us. Therefore, we will continue amassing U.S. and other countries' forces in the region. We very much want to act in accord with the entire international community. But I would like to inform you that the President is willing to assume responsibility for the dirtiest part of this operation because we are convinced that here we are talking about an important principle.

We are worried that time is passing and people will start forgetting that we are talking about occupation, atrocities, hostages, about the liquidation of the whole country. That is why we should send a very clear signal as soon as possible that Saddam has only one option.

Naturally, we will understand you if you decide that you cannot participate in our operation, but we strongly hope that you will not say "no" to the proposed resolution. I hope I gave you a satisfactory explanation of what time constraints we are facing, and why a draft resolution should be submitted to a vote as soon as possible. At the same time, the resolution would only be enforced after January 1, and only if Saddam keeps refusing to leave Kuwait. I am telling you honestly: I do not see any alternative way if we really want to ensure that the U.N. resolutions are implemented.

I would like to thank you once again for agreeing to meet with me during the holidays and on such short notice.

Shevardnadze: Mr. Secretary of State, I think it would be important if you could repeat the formula that you intend to include in the resolution.

Baker: We do not have a written text yet. I outlined in general words what we have in mind. The U.N. Security Council would adopt a resolution, in which it would demand that all earlier resolutions be carried out and state that it allows the use of all necessary and appropriate means if all those resolutions are not implemented before January 1 or some other date acceptable to the five permanent members of the Council.

The resolution would not specifically mention a military action or use of force, but during the discussions in the Security Council we will say that it allows for it.

Gorbachev: Does not exclude the use of force?

Baker: More than that, allows use of force.

This way, the sanctions will be given five or six months. This is not a short timeframe.

This is what we have in mind. Of course, we don't have much time, because we have to pass the resolution while the United States is still chair of the Security Council, and the Council's agenda includes two resolutions on Israel, so we should agree how we can resolve this issue from the procedural point of view in order to be able to pass this resolution as well. The president asked me to make this trip precisely now, without waiting for our contacts during the CSCE summit. Naturally, he will meet with you in Paris, and with the British and the French. We have reasons to believe that some non-aligned countries will support the proposed approach. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey have stated that they would fully support it. They will try to persuade Zaire, Ethiopia, and Malaysia, who are members of the Council. Yesterday I talked about it with the Chinese foreign minister, who did not say yes or no, but it seems to me that if other permanent members of the Security Council support our proposal, he would not object.

Gorbachev: Thank you for informing us about your thinking and plans. [Your] plans are very serious. But that's how they should be in such a situation.

Baker: Exactly so.

Gorbachev: We have to give it very serious consideration. Right now I just want to think aloud. First of all, let me say that in this situation we are together with you and this is very important in itself. And we should keep being together. Saddam

Hussein was not able to split the U.N. Security Council and he could not split us apart. He wants to see cracks very much. Essentially, this was his tactic from the very beginning—to split the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, to bring them to a quarrel, bring them into confrontation [with each other], to split the Arab world, to split the international community. He has failed to do it.

Furthermore, you probably noticed that when I spoke in France, I said that we see the pressure exerted by the United States as a political instrument, which is being used by the U.S. administration, by the U.N. Security Council, by all of us, in the interest of a political settlement of the problem, above all. And this presupposes that the aggression must be repelled, that everything should return to the situation that existed before August 2. I would like to emphasize this particular part of my statement once again right now. We start from the assumption that the American administration and the U.N. Security Council are committed not to a military but to a political settlement, and that our goal is to force S. Hussein's regime to fulfill the demands of the international community and the resolutions of the U.N. Security Council.

Baker: I would like to thank you for the letter in which you explained that you were talking about your preference not to use force. We understand it. We want all American soldiers to the last one to return home as soon as possible. We only intend to keep our naval presence in the Gulf [at the level] that has existed there for decades.

Gorbachev: The next consideration. We are now going through a very serious test. Are we capable, or are we not, of solving the most difficult problems on the basis of new approaches, and not the way we did during the Cold War—and so that nobody could accuse us of wanting to be a world policeman. I would like to emphasize: we want to be by your side in any situation. We want to adopt such decisions that would strengthen rather than undermine the reputation of the United States. That is why we have to think everything through very carefully. In any scenario it is necessary that the United States not find itself alone, without the support of the U.N. Security Council and without everybody's understanding.

Even before, we started from the assumption that a military option did exist. But we also thought about possible consequences. One cannot predict all of them now, but all of them will be hard and dangerous. That is why I would like to presume that what you said does not mean that we are changing our approach in principle—our preference for a political settlement and adherence to such a settlement during all stages [of the process], up to the very last moment. It is natural that the settlement must be just, restoring justice and international law, which has been violated. I hope that in our next steps within the framework of the U.N. Security Council this exact approach will prevail.

Baker: I can confirm this. We do not want a military solution because we would have to suffer the greatest casualties ourselves. But the chances for a peaceful

settlement exist only if Saddam knows that the international community is very serious.

If we say that all necessary means can be used after January 1, it does not mean that force would definitely be used. But E. A. Shevardnadze noted correctly that we would seriously lose in the eyes of the world if we show ourselves incapable of acting in a situation where Saddam refuses to implement the U.N. resolution. That is why we are not proposing our approach lightly. We are convinced that time, unfortunately, is not on our side. Only one chance for a political settlement is left: to make it very clear to Saddam that if he does not withdraw, force will be used.

We agree that a political solution should be our top priority. But there is a point where we must show our will and readiness to cross the line and do what must be done.

We are talking about a new international order, which can be created now thanks to what we, the USA and the USSR, have already done together. And now we are confronted with the first real crisis after the Cold War. The trouble is that we are faced with a person who does not recognize any moral norms, and if such a person wins, trampling the will of the international community, that means that we will not be able to build this new international order.

Gorbachev: No, we will not let this happen. A victory by Saddam would create a very bad precedent at the threshold of a new period in history. You should have no doubts about our position. It will not change. We want to use all opportunities for a political settlement. We do not want you to act on the basis of Article 51. We want to see the United States and ourselves act together, so that we would settle this crisis together. That is why we should use the potential of the U.N. Security Council, and we will cooperate with you on this.

We will think about these serious considerations that you have laid out. We will think about what we can do ourselves. We can see that you are frustrated and we are not excited about the results of the current efforts either. But I want to assure you: whatever efforts we undertake or will undertake in the future, our agreement with you will remain unchanged. There will be no separate steps behind your back.

Baker: Thank you, we are sure of that.

As far as the question about how to act—on the basis of Article 51 or within the framework of the U.N. Security Council—we would prefer to act together with you and other members of the Council. This is precisely why I am here.

Gorbachev: I am all for it. [...]

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