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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

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4/7/2014 MM

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Jozsef Antall, Prime Minister of Hungary

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
Jozsef Antall, Prime Minister  
Interpreter: Pat Austin  
Notetaker: Robert Hutchings, NSC Staff

DATE, TIME August 19, 1991, 6:02 - 6:32 p.m.  
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Hello, Mr. Prime Minister, can you hear me all right? (U)

Prime Minister Antall: Yes. (U)

The President: Well, this is George Bush and I just wanted to check in with you on this very disturbing situation in the Soviet Union.

(S)

Prime Minister Antall: Thank you very much, Mr. President for your interest. We, too, are very anxious and we consider this to be a very difficult situation. (S)

The President: Well, it is. I'd like to run down a couple of talking points, if that is agreeable to you, and then ask for your opinions. (S)

Prime Minister Antall: Yes. (U)

The President: First, I know you are concerned because of your own proximity and your history, and I want you to know that you are very much in our minds as we try to do whatever we can from way over here in the United States. Right now, we do not believe that there is a Soviet threat to your own security. We believe that the Soviets will not want to give you any trouble. They have plenty of their own. The Soviets also know that creating problems for you would produce an even stronger reaction in the West. But we are going to keep a close eye on the situation and continue to keep you informed from this end on anything that will affect your interests. I'm sure the people there are nervous, and I would hope that you, and if we can help in any way, that we can help calm the people and avoid any actions that could be used against the reformers in the Soviet Union. And if it would help you in any way, I have no problem with your making public the fact that I called and indeed I'd like to tell our press people

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here to put out the fact that I talked to you to express our keen interest in all of this. I'm anxious to get your views. (S)

Prime Minister Antall: Thank you very much, Mr. President, for your interest. Let me begin right at the end. I'm very happy that you telephoned, Mr. President, and I think it's very important that we publicize. This in itself would be of great assistance if it is publicized in the U.S. and if we, too, publicize it. (S)

The President: Then we will go ahead and do that before I leave the office tonight. (S)

Prime Minister Antall: Thank you. Another thing I would like to thank you for is that, despite the fact that you are at a distance, you are looking at our problem up close. At this moment in time, we, too, feel that there is not a direct threat from the Soviet Union. We think that this is proof of justification for the haste with which Hungary eliminated the Warsaw Treaty, dissolved the COMECON, and worked with such haste to withdraw Soviet troops from Hungary. It would have been horrible if this had taken place under the former situation. This is why we were the ones who last June, almost on our own, initiated a very quick dissolution. And we are seeing now how careful German policy is on this matter and how nervous Polish policy is. All the more so since there are significant numbers of Soviet troops in these two countries. The Polish have proposed that, together with Czechoslovakia, the three of us hold a consultation and we are going to do this. (S)

The other is that, yes, there is a certain amount of nervousness among the people in Hungary, too. Others are thinking of activating certain communist forces, which includes looking for a certain amount of support from China in a situation like this. And this is why it is extremely important that we calm the Hungarian people. I made a statement to this effect tonight on television; and I stressed to Chancellor Kohl when we spoke this afternoon, before he held his press conference, that it would have been very important to have emphasized NATO's accord regarding the situation in Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, the lack of a joint position on this issue had a very bad effect in central Europe. It didn't put enough pressure on the Serbian communist nationalist forces. As I emphasized, Serbia was of value from the point of view of a model. I think that Serbia was a testing ground. And there was cooperation between the Russians and the Serbians in military circles. It is very important precisely for this reason that the issue of Yugoslavia not be neglected at this time because it is possible that they will take advantage of the crisis among the Russians. It would be very important to have a statement which also includes Yugoslavia, because these orthodox communist forces tend to reinforce one another. It would be very important to get a message to Yugoslavia, and it would also be extremely important that the French and the British make a statement regarding Serbia. (S)

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The other issue, regarding the Soviet Union, is that among the other member republics there should be a statement issued on Russia and the Ukraine with an emphasis on them. If we want to give one last minute chance to the forces of reform and to Gorbachev, it can only be through Yeltsin at this point. (S)

The President: Right, I agree. (U)

Prime Minister Antall: There are military forces that stand alongside Yeltsin. As long as he is free to move about, he is the only one who can be a crystallizing point. One thing, I know this is a very difficult, difficult issue, but I think of major assistance would be if the West were to issue a statement recognizing the Baltic republics and we, too, could do that. The other issue to be raised is what type of immediate economic sanctions could be brought into play. In the Soviet Union, the only way results can be achieved is through social demagoguery, so in the first period of time they are going to throw food on the market. And it is only through this that it will become possible to indicate to the Soviet leaders that they will not be able to produce the food supplies. They will not be able to give food to the people if they become isolated. So very, very clear economic and financial measures would be necessary. This is what perhaps these leaders might understand. (S)

Obviously this whole action is not the work of Yanayev, who is playing the part of a marionette here. Obviously it is within the army, the KGB and the party apparatus that are cooperating now. The way I see it, within a day or two, the first step will be to officially remove Gorbachev from the party, and in the days to come they will convene their parliament, the Supreme Soviet, and there they will try to legalize Gorbachev's removal. The fact that the statement made this evening to the effect that Gorbachev was ill and after getting well might be able to return, is an indication that this action is not yet completed. I don't think the army will be united against Gorbachev. This, however, contains a danger of civil war as well as the possibility that they will try to seek some compromise with the forces of reform. And therefore it would be very important to emphasize that the West would only consider a freely and openly elected leader to be a partner to them as well as the freely elected presidents of the republics. (S)

It would be very important to make a statement, or at least to find the means of establishing contact with China. We have seen that the very few conservative forces within Hungary have been supported by China most recently, and a cooperation between the Soviet Union and China would be very worrisome indeed. So we would recommend pressure on China and possibly as regards the Baltic republics to consider and publicize the prospect of their recognition as autonomous republics if it becomes impossible to work together with the Soviet Union. (S)

And it would also be something that we'll be very grateful for if it were emphasized through NATO that this region of the world is

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not a matter of indifference -- Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary -- and if the whole area were to be treated in keeping with the Paris Charter. If you remember what I said in the speech I made at the Paris Summit before the signing of the Charter, I mentioned the fact that there are armies that could potentially put an end to the process of democratization taking place in this region of the world. I would like to have a picture of Yazov and the way he looked at me when I said that. (Laughter.) I think it would have been important to recognize earlier that Shevardnadze's and Yakovlev's separations were all messages from Gorbachev. They were explicit in saying the messages that Gorbachev himself was unable to say. For the moment, what we don't know is whether his trip to the Crimean peninsula was voluntary, since this was a verbatim repeat of the scenario that took place when Khrushchev was ousted from power and Brezhnev was put in his place. This is what I can say for the moment and would be grateful for a few words from you. (8)

The President: I think these are all very important comments. I do see difficulty in instantly recognizing the independence of the Baltic states. We will continue to reiterate, however, our conviction that the Baltic states should be treated differently, because we never recognized their incorporation into the Soviet Union. But I think it's important that we do nothing to encourage the Baltics to go into military action unless of course the whole West was prepared to help them, and that would mean that we would be in a war with Soviet troops. I would like to try to avoid military confrontation if we possibly can. I will be putting out a statement this evening supporting Yeltsin's call, a call for the restoration of legally elected organs of power and a call for the reaffirmation of the post of USSR President Gorbachev. I will also say that we are going to base our policy on reform in the Soviet Union continuing -- including, of course, democracy and peaceful reconciliation between the center and the republics. Like you, we will support all the constitutionally elected leaders and state our opposition to the use of force or intimidation, or suppression of the right to free speech. I also will point out that we oppose the use of force in the Baltic states or as a matter of fact in any of the republics. Then we will call for the Soviets to abide by their treaties and commitments, including the Charter of Paris commitments, so we will be avoiding lending legitimacy or any support to this coup. Another point is I think it would be a big mistake on our part to make this an East-West confrontation. We want to see Europe give more support to the eastern European countries; support in making clear that they are not floating around without the support of Europe and, of course, of the United States. Just for the hell of it, I placed a phone call to Gorbachev, and they told me that they would get back to the operator in five minutes and that was about two hours ago. But I did that because I want the leaders there to understand that we still feel that Gorbachev is the due process head of the Soviet Union. But in any event, this matter is developing, and if I see anything at all that adversely affects Hungary, I will be sure to contact you, with your permission. (8)

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Prime Minister Antall: I'd be very grateful. I, too, had not thought of recognizing the Baltic states as instantly but rather as a prospect to be raised if things go that far. (S)

The President: OK, I've enjoyed this conversation. I respect what you are doing there, and I hope that we can be helpful. (C)

Prime Minister Antall: Thank you very much, and let's hope that everything will be successful. Please don't neglect the economic and financial issue regarding the Soviet Union. With your permission, Mr. President, I would like to call you if we get somewhere with our neighboring countries. (C)

The President: I would appreciate it very much and thank you, sir. (U)

Prime Minister Antall: Goodnight. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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