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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: President's Telephone Conversation with Prime Minister Major of the United Kingdom

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Prime Minister Major
Notetaker: Beth Sanner, NSC Staff

DATE, TIME: August 21, 1991, 10:00 a.m. - 10:14 a.m.
AND PLACE: Kennebuckport, Maine

Prime Minister Major: Good afternoon. (U)

The President: John. Good morning, how are you? I'm going by your time since the events over where you are are controlling the world. (U)

Prime Minister Major: . I always forget time there. (U)

The President: Nothing particularly new, except I had an interesting 35 minute phone call with Yeltsin this morning. I talked a few minutes ago to him, thought I could fill it in for you. (U)

Prime Minister Major: I haven't spoken with Yeltsin today. (U)

The President: Yeltsin is more confident now, but he's not declaring victory. He's been in the Parliament for the last two days, there are still some tanks around. Tens of thousands of people were out there. The Supreme Soviet met today and unanimously labeled the coup illegal. There will be a meeting of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and they are lobbying the delegates to declare the coup illegal. As you know there are still hard-liners in that organization. That meeting is on the 26th. (U)

Overnight Yeltsin had a meeting with Kruchkov. They agreed to fly out to meet Gorbachev, but the Supreme Soviet would not allow it because of safety reasons. They are sending their Prime Minister, Primakov, and Bakatin, who are all pro-Yeltsin, to the Crimea to see him. Unfortunately 40 minutes before, the junta, led by Yazov, headed out and will try to force Gorbachev to sign something or take him away. Kravchuk is trying to deflect them. Nazarbayev and Kravchuk are behind Yeltsin. It is a race or a game to see Gorbachev. (U)

Yeltsin told me that the danger of a siege remains. The commander of the air assault troops has come over to Yeltsin and

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is withdrawing to base. The Deputy Prime Minister has been deployed to the center of Russia in case anything happens to him. Kravchuk and Nazarbayev refused to obey the coup last night. Yeltsin is also in touch with KGB chairman Kruchkov. The big question is whether Kravchuk can stop them. (C)

We heard that Thatcher called Reagan, because they have "been in it together since the beginning." I'll speak to Reagan in the hospital and keep him informed. He is going into the hospital. We don't need any outside contacts at this point. (C)

Prime Minister Major: I'm not surprised. (U)

The President: I'll try to see if we can be helpful, maybe Reagan can be helpful. (C)

Prime Minister Major: We can try. I'm sorry about that. Its a problem we're having here. (C)

The President: Yeltsin said he was given a special switching device to get calls into Gorbachev, but couldn't get through, the operators wouldn't let him through. Guards say that Gorbachev is healthy. This is good news. (C)

Prime Minister Major: That's very good news. (U)

The President: Of course he's been wrong on things before, the five minutes thing. (C)

Prime Minister Major: Absolutely, even if that was an error in translation, and we don't believe it was. I just spoke with Embassy Moscow. There are some contradictions with what Yeltsin told you. They heard that coup leaders were headed for Kirghizia. There are also rumors that some of the 8 have been arrested. A chap called Filirov went with Kruchkov to see Gorbachev. However, I think what you heard from Yeltsin is likely to be correct. (C)

The President: I think so. He said his people had gone down there. That Lukyanov was backtracking. Pavlov is in his hospital bed, a diplomatic illness. I asked if Bessmertnykh was back. I said he was a career man. Yeltsin seemed to scoff at this. I'm wondering when the diplomatic stuff will resume. He said we are going out again this morning in support of the government and constitution. He mentioned the 26 August Supreme Soviet meeting. It sounds like politics is normal there, they are lobbying the delegates. But the other side is lobbying too. (C)

Prime Minister Major: The politics are very intense, too. If and when Gorbachev returns to Moscow the politics between Yeltsin and Gorbachev will be intense. We met with Kagalovski, an economic advisor to Yeltsin, this morning and he had 3 basic messages. First that he was very grateful for our support. Second, do not underestimate the value of moral support as the messages from Western capitals are getting through. And third

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that the events are moving in favor of the republics, not the union. Yeltsin will have the upper hand. (Ø)

The President: That seems clear. I talked to Ambassador Strauss, who talked with Braithwaite who said they were sending people down to the Crimea to meet with Gorbachev. (Ø)

Prime Minister Major: I spoke with the Embassy just 5 minutes ago. Ambassador Braithwaite will be staying in Moscow. Jeff Morel is at the airport and will be heading to the Crimea with parliamentarians from US, Germany, France, and possibly the European Commission. Whether they have taken off I don't know, I've asked Ambassador Braithwaite to contact me when he returns from the airport. (Ø)

The President: Our man missed the plane I think. Yeltsin is trying to gain control of the airport so when the coup group return he can take control of them. (Ø)

Yeltsin said that 30 planes of Spetznaz troops were going to the Baltics. He is trying to get them on his side. Whether they are going to or not is not sure. He's trying to woo the leader and get him not to send them into the Baltics. (Ø)

Prime Minister Major: I have just had a note handed to me. Tass is reporting "committee of eight disbanded." Those who gave it to Tass I don't know. (Ø)

The President: What does that mean? It looks like things are going in the right direction and we do not want to declare victory yet. We don't want to undermine Yeltsin and want to be careful of Gorbachev's position. (Ø)

Prime Minister Major: Alas. We need to be very careful about Gorbachev. Yeltsin's position has been remarkably strengthened. ... Gorbachev may be in a difficult position indeed. (Ø)

The President: No? At least they are staying together. Out of this we may have a different looking Soviet Union. But out of this Gorbachev's power will be retained. (Ø)

Prime Minister Major: He was amazingly brave over the last 48 hours. These have been a momentous couple of days, no? (Ø)

The President: Amazing. Holler if you hear any more. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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