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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Republic, USSR

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Boris Yeltsin, President
Interpreter: Peter Afanassenko
Notetaker: Beth Sanner (NSC Staff)

DATE, TIME August 21, 1991, 8:30 - 9:05am
AND PLACE: Kennebunkport, Maine

The President: Boris, how are you doing today? (U)

President Yeltsin: Well I've spent the last 2 days sitting in the Parliament building without leaving the premises. Mr. President, I want to tell you I had discussions with Kryuchkov and the military and the forces were stopped. Tens of thousands of people stopped them from storming the building. ~~(S)~~

This morning the Russian Supreme Soviet was in session and unanimously decided to categorically say the coup attempt is illegal and will not have any affect on Russian territory. The Supreme Soviet supported all decrees and decisions I have made as President of Russia. They also gave me additional powers to see to it that if local authorities support the junta, they can be removed from office. ~~(S)~~

Overnight an agreement was reached between me and Kryuchkov that we would fly together to where Gorbachev is being held. But the Supreme Soviet, for safety reasons, will not allow me to leave. Prime Minister Silayev and Vice President Rutskoy have been sent instead, also Primakov and Bakatin are on their way there. ~~(S)~~

Unfortunately, forty minutes before our group departed, 5 of the junta including Yazov flew out before us. What they want to do is intercept Gorbachev and either force him to sign a paper or take him to points unknown. ~~(S)~~

What I'm trying to do is work with Kravchuk (head of Ukraine) to intercept them and have them land in Simferopol' in the Crimea and not let them get to him (Gorbachev) first. Now there are three aircraft flying in that direction, trying to get there first. ~~(S)~~

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The danger of the siege remains as before. The group commander of the air assault troops refused to follow orders of the Ministry of Defense and has decided to come over to the Russian side. Following my order, he has left Moscow with his forces and gone back to base. Our group headed by my Deputy Prime Minister is located in the geographical center of Russia, so in the event that I am taken, Russian leadership will continue. ~~(S)~~

Also last evening, Kravchuk and Nazarbayev reported that they too decided not to fulfill decisions by the junta. Tens of thousands of Muscovites continue to surround the RSFSR building. And, based on my order, all forces and tanks are moving out to the periphery of Moscow. However, there remain KGB spetsnaz forces not following my orders and still capable of attack. This is the situation at this hour. ~~(S)~~

The President: Can I ask some questions? Will Kravchuk cooperate with you in seeing that the five coup members will not meet with Gorbachev? ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: I'm not sure. Kravchuk said he would do everything possible, however, those planes are jam-packed with security forces. He promised that air traffic controllers in Ukraine would make them land in Simferopol' and not where Gorbachev is. But I'm not sure because there are other technical problems. ~~(S)~~

The President: Can anyone in the USSR get in touch with Gorbachev? ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: No, because even I have tried several times today.. You need a special switching device. We are told by operators that we can't get through not even to any of his assistants. Either we can't get through or they are blocking us. Through Gorbachev's guards we have determined that Gorbachev is quite healthy and determined not to sign any documents that would give his power to anyone. If we can't intercept the group in the Crimea we will attempt to intercept when they return to Moscow. We are ready to do this. I can't give you the details about it over this phone. ~~(S)~~

The President: I understand. What has happened to the other three coup members. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: Lukyanov for one is backtracking and making it appear that he never was with the group in the first place and is fully supporting constitutional measures. Those three remaining in Moscow remain to continue managing the coup in Moscow. Pavlov is in bed in the hospital. ~~(S)~~

The President: Is it a real sickness? ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: No, a diplomatic sickness. ~~(S)~~

The President: Is Bessmertnykh back in office? ~~(S)~~

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President Yeltsin: Yes, but he is maintaining quiet neutrality. ~~(S)~~

The President: We are anxious to do anything helpful, not counterproductive. Do you have any suggestions? ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: Unfortunately, other than propagandizing our plight and moral support and statements I can't see anything for you, technical or any other way, to help us at this point. The main task now is on 26 August when there will be a USSR Supreme Soviet session. We will try to get a resolution saying that the Committee's takeover is an illegal act. We are working with each of the deputies to guarantee such a vote. The group would then be found to be outside of the law and could be tried. ~~(S)~~

The President: Are you confident of this now? ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: Well the other side is working hard to lobby people's deputies. We have a lot of delegates from Russia and are trying to influence as much as possible. ~~(S)~~

The President: I'm glad the democratic process is working. Whatever we can do I will do it. I made a strong statement yesterday in support of you efforts. (U)

President Yeltsin: I thank you very much for that. Yes I did hear of your big statement yesterday. Please don't view this an interference in our internal affairs, this is an important statement by the American President in support of the Soviet people. (U)

The President: What about the Baltic states? ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: As far as the Baltics are concerned, 30 Spetznaz aircraft are being sent. They are beginning to take over a number of sites and locations. What we're trying to do is lobby the commander of the Spetznaz forces to come over to our side and not send troops there. We are now holding discussions with him. If we convince him, he will withdraw forces. He reports to Yazov, the Minister of Defense. ~~(S)~~

The President: Good luck to you. If you want to call again we can set a time. I will make another statement today. We will mention the call if you think this would be helpful. (U)

President Yeltsin: I thank you very much for your support and kind words. I told the Supreme Soviet of this and it was received well. I think we should talk again tomorrow. (U)

The President: OK, we'll schedule a call for the same time, 8:30 our time. Will it help today if I mention this call? (U)

President Yeltsin: No, no, no, this will not hurt at all. This is excellent. We have some way of getting the information out. We will try to get your statement out to the people. People understand what you are saying and are receiving it well. (U)

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The President: People are supporting you. I will tell them again today. Any word of Moiseyev? ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: He is working. He is continuing to carry out orders of the Minister of Defense and our attempts to lobby him have been fruitless. ~~(S)~~

Thank you very much again. (U)

The President: We will keep supporting you. People throughout the world are supporting you, except Iraq, Libya, and Cuba, crazy little renegade countries. People are supporting you more than you can understand. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: I will do everything I can to save democracy in Russia and throughout the USSR. ~~(S)~~

-- End of Conversation --

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