

Exchange With Reporters on the Telephone Conversation with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev

January 11, 1991

Q. Mr. President, what can you tell us about the Gorbachev phone call?

The President. We've had a very interesting morning here and a very interesting phone call with President Gorbachev, Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu of Japan, and then a meeting with a lot of the Members of the House of Representatives on the Gulf situation. Now we're shifting our gears to this luncheon with two of our new Cabinet-level officers and, obviously, with one existing Cabinet member, Carla Hills, where our conversation will be both domestic and international. So, it's been a full day.

On the Gorbachev phone call, I won't give you the details of it, but it is very important as we move down the path here that we stay in close touch. And I was very pleased—this was his call to me, and it was a discussion of the Gulf situation mainly. We also talked about the internal problems that he's facing. But I think the very fact he called in the true spirit of consultation says a lot not just about the U.S.-Soviet relationship but about the fact that it is not simply Iraq versus the United States; it is Iraq, indeed, versus the whole world. I think that's the symbolism of Mr. Gorbachev's call. And he had some ideas he wanted to discuss with me. And I respect his confidentiality, but it's the best sense of consultation. We are leaving no stone unturned to try to find a peaceful resolution of this question.

Q. TASS [Soviet news agency] said, Mr. President, that the conversation would be continued.

The President. Well, as you may know, I left out one meeting, and that is that I did meet with the Soviet Ambassador here following the Gorbachev call. But whether President Gorbachev and I talk again I'm not—we didn't set a time. Perhaps we will. We've been in touch, and I will continue to stay in touch with him and with other world leaders to see if we cannot resolve this matter peacefully.

I might, as long—take advantage of you all, but to say that I still feel that it would be very helpful to the last step for peace

if the Congress would move and would support the so-called U.N. resolutions that are before the House now and will be before the Senate.

Q. What about the crackdown on the Baltics?

The President. There was not great discussion of that. I did, as you know, make clear in the statement issued by our Press Secretary the fact that the United States feels that the use of force particularly in the Baltics would be counterproductive. There was some discussion of the internal affairs of the Soviet Union when I talked to Mr. Gorbachev. He knows of my position, that we view the Baltics differently. They were not incorporated. We feel that they have a very different standing than other Republics, and I reiterated my position on that.

But it was mainly about the Gulf, although we did talk about this. And, of course, I am very hopeful that they can find a way to resolve these extraordinarily complex problems without resorting to force.

Q. Did he tell you his plans for Lithuania, whether he's going to impose—

The President. We didn't go into any detail.

Q. There was some discussion, Mr. President, that when you and Mr. Gorbachev met in Paris there was a tacit understanding that before we went to war in the Gulf we would clear it with the Soviets.

The President. There was no tacit understanding, but I'll guarantee you I'm going to continue to stay in very close touch with all the key players here—the administration is; I can't do it all alone. But as I say, we talked to the Prime Minister of Japan this morning, and also to President Gorbachev. As you know, I had extensive consultations in the last few days with Prime Minister Major, President Mitterrand, Prime Minister Mulroney, and on and on.

So, there's no agreement. But the Soviet Union is very important in all of this, and they had a strong leadership role in the

implementation of the United Nations resolutions. And I think it is most important that they be closely clued into whatever is to come.

Q. What was his message to you about the Gulf, if he talked about that?

The President. I'm not going to go into the details on it.

Q. I take it that you feel they remain a staunch member of the anti-Iraq coalition?

The President. We remain in sync on this—as the way we look at this situation there. And they are absolutely convinced—I don't want to put words in anyone's mouth, but I think I can do this without fear of contradiction—they are absolutely convinced that Saddam Hussein should get out of Kuwait in total compliance with the U.N. resolutions. And I am sure that that is their view.

Q. Did he ask for more time for sanctions to work?

The President. I'm not going to go into any details, but that would be incompatible with full implementation of the resolutions. So, I guess I could say no to that one.

Q. Did you repeat to him that the crack-down would be counterproductive—

The President. I will not go into any more detail. I had every opportunity to express the forcefully and long-held view of the United States on that question.

Q. Were there any new proposals or new approaches that were suggested?

Q. Sir, do you think you're going to get the vote?

The President. That was something again I'd rather not discuss in detail, but all of us are trying to think if there's something that we can do that will result in full compliance with the U.N. resolutions. And certainly that's true of Mr. Gorbachev. He has a lot of experts on that area in the government in the Soviet Union, and so you can assume that he was thinking innovatively. But again, I don't want to go into any more detail.

Thank you all very much.

Note: The exchange began at 12:10 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, President Bush referred to Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu of Japan; Secretary of Labor-designate Lynn M. Martin; Bob Martinez, Director-designate of National Drug Control Policy; U.S. Trade Representative Carla A. Hills; Aleksandr Bessmertnykh, Soviet Ambassador to the United States; Prime Minister John Major of the United Kingdom; President Francois Mitterrand of France; Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of Canada; and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

President Bush also referred to the following statement on the situation in the Soviet Union and the Baltic States which Press Secretary Fitzwater had read during his press briefing on January 8:

The United States is monitoring carefully the Soviet Government's decision to send additional military forces to Moldavia, the Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and the three Baltic States—Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. This action represents a serious step toward an escalation of tension within the U.S.S.R. and makes the peaceful evolution of relations among the people of the Soviet Union more difficult.

The United States is especially concerned that the Soviet decision to send military units into the Baltic States, which we view as provocative and counterproductive, could damage the prospects for peaceful and constructive negotiations on the future of those States. The United States urges the U.S.S.R. to cease attempts at intimidation and turn back to negotiations that are conducted free of pressure and the use of force.

The United States, which has never recognized the forcible incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union, supports the aspirations of the Baltic people to control and determine their own future.