

Translated Excerpts
Emergency Session of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR
August 21, 1991

R. K. Mikailov – Member of the Supreme Soviet (RSFSR), Makhachkalinski national-territorial electoral district, Soviet Socialist Republic of Dagestan:

“You have all probably heard the kind of news that’s been going around...more accurately, disinformation. There is a lack of objective news and facts. In essence, no one knows what’s going on. Our session is the only opportunity to inform people about what’s actually happening.”

A.N. Greshnevikov – Member of the Supreme Soviet (RSFSR), Uglichski territorial electoral district, Yaroslavskaya Oblast:

“Two strangers approached me. I requested that they show their documents and they didn’t react. They took me from my hotel, led me to the train station, and demanded that I buy a ticket and leave town. I was only saved by my legs. I would like to know if laws regarding the status of people’s deputies will be observed, or will every deputy have to protect himself?”

R.I. Khasbulatov – First Deputy Chair of the Supreme Soviet (RSFSR):

-“The emergency session of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR has been called amid truly tragic days for our fatherland, when a self-proclaimed junta known as the State Committee of the State of Emergency removed the country’s lawful president from power and implemented a counter-reformist coup d’état, putting our country on the brink of civil war.

Along with Gorbachev’s removal from power, the strategic objectives of the plotters also included ousting the head of the Russian state, as well as the capture and internment of the Russian president, progressive members of the Supreme Soviet, and government. This is obvious and beyond all doubt.

These goals were addressed sequentially, strictly, shamelessly, and with massive scope. Soldiers were stationed in Moscow: more than 500 tanks, nearly 10 distinct divisions, and separate regiments - including the Special Forces, KGB, riot police, and assault teams. The primary objective was the capture of the building housing the Supreme Soviet and government of Russia, which had been surrounded with a thick ring of armored vehicles and military units. These units were prepared at a moment’s notice to capture the last stronghold of freedom, which after having been taken would allow the coup’s perpetrators to achieve country-wide victory and unleash a bloody terror against the people who choose the path to freedom and a rejuvenation of the Motherland. In these trying hours we could resist these soldiers only with the will and resolve of the people. Lines of heroic Muscovites appeared. They stood in the path of the plotters and their Special Forces, and they defended the honor and dignity of Russia’s first president,

the Supreme Soviet, and the government of the Russian Federation. We admire their courage...We admire their courage and sincerely thank them.”

-“...I would like to add that leaders of Western countries - including President Bush and the Prime Minister of Great Britain, as well as Eastern European leaders – including President Gavel of Bulgaria, had a very significant effect on the coup’s perpetrators. This morning the President of Russia called Francois Mitterrand. They said with absolute resolve and clarity that the only guarantee for the free development of the USSR at this stage is seen in the position of the Russian Federation, its president, and the Supreme Soviet. In this particular case, the conversation obviously pertained to several decisions made by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and the Russian government. And thanks to this understanding of the broader political trend on the part of progressive forces, our progressives first and foremost, for the time being we have successfully avoided massive bloodshed...although any blood, the blood of one person, one casualty is an entire world, and we mourn the tragic loss of life that is a general result of this coup. But we have nevertheless succeeded in stopping an intensification of this process at a sufficiently high level.”

-“...So, why do you think this event occurred on the eve of the signing of the Union Treaty? Why did this signing frighten the counter-reform plotters so much? Doesn’t it seem that there are some extremely serious and deep-seated reasons? Remember how we were reproached (Boris Nikolayevich got it especially bad) because, as they said, they don’t want to support a reformed union, they don’t want to re-work and sign the Union Treaty. There were so many critics and unjustifiably so. We then proved through our actions that we are in favor of both a united Soviet Union and a united Russia. And then when we actually began to participate, practically taking charge of the Union Treaty’s development, finalization, and signing...all of a sudden the same critics that had criticized us precisely over these issues were silent for the first time. Then they began to criticize us, saying ‘Aha! So, this new Union is beneficial to Russia and Russia’s leadership’, and they started searching for some sort of hidden explanation that could clarify why it’s beneficial. For some reason they never used common sense – it’s beneficial because there will be a united Soviet Union and a united Russia. The logic is simple, common sense and nothing else. No trickery or catch in this matter, whatsoever, and there never was. But it really was necessary to catch, as they say, the fish in filthy water, to find some sort of scheme, some sort of advantage, with which to torpedo the Union Treaty.

Of course, I’m talking about the self-sufficiency of republics, about the very serious decentralization of a rigidly centralized administrative system. I’m talking, of course, about traditional party-state structures losing almost all of their power. So, interests, institutional interests, in this case have started to catalyze and absorb to a significant extent the same reactionary forces that found the Union Treaty to be problematic.

By all means, it wasn’t the only reason. Another reason is that serious and profound changes, especially those that have taken place in Russia, didn’t suit reactionary forces. Naturally, these changes that occurred here in the Russian Federation, and the

laws that were implemented by the Supreme Soviet, as you know, had such tremendous significance for the Union's Supreme Soviet and for Union republics, and also for the Supreme Soviets of other republics. Naturally, that sort of development just didn't suit these reactionary circles.

The third reason, obviously, was the fact that after long deliberations, hesitation, indecisiveness, and concessions to the right and to the extreme-right – but nothing to the left, Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev more or less chose the path to reform under the influence of domestic public opinion and the opinion of the international community.

The reactionaries didn't care for such a change of heart by a national leader. And so, as a result of this intermingling of various causes and problems...the reactionary forces responsible for the coup d'état were drawn together. [The regime] has an enduring character, it didn't disappear, this regime is active, and we should seriously confront and reckon with them. This is indisputable. It therefore behooves us to make a very complex and serious decision about this issue today. I think that the entire block of issues must specifically concern the observations I have made from the standpoint of concrete actions." (Pg. 2-4)

Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin – President of the Russian Federation:

-“Respected peoples deputies, our country, Russia, is experiencing dramatic and, perhaps, tragic moments in its history. This has already happened many times in the history of our country and, unfortunately, even in this period, when it would seem democratization has begun to catch on and gain momentum, right-wing forces have attempted to implement a coup several times and, finally, they did.

As you remember, the first attempt was at the beginning of the year, but at that time Minister of Foreign Affairs Shevardnadze scared them with an announcement about dictatorship that conformed to the opinion of Russia, other countries, and the entire world.

You remember the Supreme Soviet session where basically the same individuals – Pavlov, Kryuchkov, Yazov – tried to demand special authority and a strangulation of the rights of the country's president, along with his removal from power and so forth. That was the second attempt, which didn't work, and which wasn't supported by the Supreme Soviet.

Finally, the third attempt succeeded. When the country's president was on vacation, and it isn't a vacation anymore, isolated in the Crimea at his summer home in Foros, this unconstitutional coup was executed.

This coup is undoubtedly unconstitutional insofar as no announcements whatsoever were issued by the president – not in writing, not on television, not on the radio...there weren't any medical examinations either on our side or from the World Health Organization verifying that the president is unfit to rule. On the contrary, our information, which we received from the president's personal doctor – with whom he met on exactly August 19th, after which they were kept from contacting one another, asserts that the president is healthy with the sole exception of minor back pain – which can't be incapacitating.

This coup is brazen and unprecedented in the context of a truly developing democratic society, and what's more, all of the surnames that you see present, they are all right-wing, absolutely all are one and the same and all are well-known...

[The plotters] couldn't even find two or three pseudo-democrats to somehow make their list of members a bit prettier. Although attempts were made by [pseudo-democrats/democrats], they were rejected by the plotters, and their comrades refused to take part in this unconstitutional plot.

Thus it began.

First, in the coup's initial hours, literally on the morning of the 19th, an appeal was made to the citizens of Russia, an appeal signed by Comrades Silayev, Khasbulatov, and me. Although at present all media outlets – especially Russian media – have been blocked, we didn't have the opportunity to immediately broadcast this appeal to everyone, but by means of this building's powerful radio station, through phone calls and so forth, we transmitted our appeal and the following orders of the Russian President to the majority of regions.

In these days the following decrees were given: about the appeal made by this committee being unconstitutional – Decree number 59; about the chairman of the State Committee of Russia for Matters of Defense; about the organizational transfer of all executive power of the USSR, KGB, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Defense of the USSR on the territory of the RSFSR to a position subordinate to the President of the RSFSR. Insofar as the supreme commander of the armed forces and Minister of Defense, who entered into this Committee, is absent and a criminal, we had to assume command of USSR troops stationed on the territory of the Russian Federation.

Furthermore, there was a declaration about the formation of a special group headed by the first deputy chairman of the Soviet of Ministers of the Russian Federation and that such a group would begin to work in the event that a capture and disposal of the leadership of the Russian Federation were executed tonight (and maybe such a danger still can't be totally discounted). In such a situation, the group would take on the executive power of Russia.

Next, a decree was issued about the actions of Yanaev, Pavlov, and others. The decree about direction of the armed forces, that is to say control of the armed forces in such a situation, would be assumed by the President of the Russian Federation. In fact, many military units and divisions – Tamanskaya, Kantemirovskaya, a group of paratroopers – switched over to the side of the Russian Federation and carried out the orders and directions of the President of Russia (*Applause*).

We are thankful to this division, and for its leadership, for General Lebed, although of course he is in definite danger. But I think that also by decree of the President of Russia, in addition to the fact that they are now located within the jurisdiction of Russia, I took it upon myself to protect them from actions on the part of USSR law enforcement organs. (*Applause*)

Decrees were signed about the functioning of enterprises in the Russian Federation and about the maintenance of the economic sovereignty of the RSFSR. I would like to talk a bit more about this in greater detail. Taking into account that the signing of the Union Treaty was set to take place on the 20th, and that there was an understanding with the President of the USSR that on the 21st or 22nd he would sign a decree concerning a transfer of enterprises and property located on the territory of the

Russian Federation over to Russian Federation jurisdiction, we had a prepared decree so that these enterprises would be transferred to Russian Federation jurisdiction. Also on account of the fact that it was the fault of an unconstitutional group with no connection to the country's president that this didn't happen on the 20th, I signed a decree about the maintenance of RSFSR economic sovereignty and, correspondingly, about all property on Russian territory transferring over to Russian jurisdiction. (*Applause*)

Due to the fact that a curfew has been implemented in Moscow, Leningrad, and so on, I have changed up the command districts. In the districts of Moscow and Leningrad new individuals have been appointed who will obey corresponding Soviets and the mayors of Moscow and Leningrad. Also, General-Colonel Konstantin Ivanovich Kobetz was appointed Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation. (*Applause*).

Appeals to the citizens of the country, as I already said, or more accurately to the citizens of Russia, to Muscovites, to serving members of the armed forces, were signed. And also, an appeal was sent to US President Bush. Vice President Aleksandr Vladimirovich Rutskoy dispatched an appeal to his Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and all of Russia Aleksei the Second. His Holiness expressed his full support for the position of the Russian leadership in these hard times and said that worshippers will support this position. (*Applause*).

As Ruslan Imranovich said, an ultimate demand was worked out with ten points. Three officials led a discussion with Lukyanov. It is impossible to believe that Lukyanov didn't participate or that he didn't know that this group was prepared to commit a coup. (*Applause*).

Special instructions were made for the defense of the House of the Soviets. It was justified since a seizure of the House of the Soviets was being prepared. Moreover this seizure had been worked out in great detail, by minute and hour. And only our very decisive actions, and in very large part the actions of Muscovites, who, just like us, were here around the clock. (*Only we spent two days inside this building while Muscovites spent two days outside in the rain*). Perhaps precisely these actions played a decisive role when tanks, armored vehicles, and special forces troops, which had been sent to take the House of Soviets and intern the leadership of the Russian Federation, were stopped. (*Applause*).

Muscovites should be thanked for such decisive actions. (*Applause*).

Besides this, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation was sent to the United Nations in order to inform Mr. Perez de Cuellar and also the United Nations in general about all events connected with these anti-constitutional actions taking place in our country, and also about the actions of the leadership of the Russian Federation.

During this time I was called by President Bush, President Mitterand, English Prime-Minister Major, Czechoslovakian President Havel, Bulgarian President Zhelev, Ms. Thatcher, and also leaders of USSR republics.

It should be said frankly that Bush, Mitterand, and others announced that they strongly condemn this unconstitutional coup and actions taken by the group that announced the state of emergency, and also that they do not recognize any of the group's decisions. They support the actions of the Russian leadership and, accordingly, will take measures so that the international community supports such actions and expresses this position.

It should be said that I turned to them so that they could demand from their side: first – connections to the President of the USSR. The connection was disrupted or, more accurately, blocked in Foros and the Crimea by none other than soldiers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR, the KGB, and also by sailors - that is to say three circles. Today the air-strip is also practically blocked off, and for the time being there is no way to bring the President here. Attempts to break through these cordons have failed twice. My telephone conversations with Yanaev and Kryuchkov show that they are essentially trying to justify their actions – as if all of this were constitutional and Gorbachev is incapable of fulfilling his duties. This, of course, doesn't match up with reality. Yesterday evening after our demands, and even late at night at about 3 o'clock, Kryuchkov finally cancelled plans implemented to blockade and take by force the House of Soviets. In accordance with my proposal, he agreed to fly to Foros together and pick up President Gorbachev. But I need your permission for this. (*Noise in the hall*).

From the hall: No!

Chairman: I say the same thing to the President. (*Noise in the hall*). Just a minute, let's talk this out. Questions later.

Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin: At your insistence Kryuchkov must appear here in the session of the Supreme Soviet by 13:00 so that you may inquire as to the nature of the flight. I think that otherwise we won't clarify an objective situation. By Kryuchkov's definite guarantees...(*Noise in the hall, cries*)

I'll say it again: you have to decide.

There, perhaps all actions are going to be dealt with now. The leadership of Russia – the president, leadership of the Supreme Soviet, and the Soviet of Ministers – is energetically acting, not panicking, not despondent, and hopes that the days of this coup are through. The coup must be suspended. The Committee must be dissolved and all eight of its members must stand trial. (*Long wild applause*)."

I.V. Vinogradova – Member of the Supreme Soviet (RSFSR), Zavodskoy territorial electoral district, Novosibirskaya oblast:

"Today the fate of our homeland is being decided and every citizen must make their own choice. Totalitarianism will not survive."

A.N. Manokhin – Sovetski territorial electoral district, Nobosibirskaya oblast:

"Once again they will talk about yesterday's events and claim that people, Muscovites, attacked the soldiers first. You know this is the accepted propaganda. As such, I come to you and an array of deputies. Yesterday was certainly an attack by a column of soldiers on the outer defensive barricades of the "White house". I can say that deputies Manokhin, Granberg, Kim, and Evtushenko approached an armored vehicle requesting that the soldiers stop as their columns descended on the barricades. The deputies told them that it was the defense of the "White house", the defense of parliament and the president of

Russia. You can trust me, I'm your comrade, the armored vehicle's driver told me as I stood in front of the vehicle's hatch: "I will run you over." Afterwards they moved and, once more, stopped immediately above our heads...people from the barricades had already surrounded them...[the soldiers] opened fire. We got out of their way, let's say we dodged, and they just attacked and sent the barricades flying..."

S.F. Gorban – Member of the Supreme Soviet (RSFSR), Zavodskoy national-territorial electoral district, Mariskaya Soviet Socialist Republic:

-“The criminal junta, which risked a coup at the very moment when the entire country was clearly moving towards democratization, committed an offense for which there is no forgiveness.”

-“Esteemed comrades! As you know, blood was spilled last night. It seems to me that this is no longer a political issue, but rather a moral one. We are indebted to [those that died].”

V.I. Zhigulin – Member of the Supreme Soviet (RSFSR), Chukotski autonomous territorial electoral district, Chukotskaya Special Administrative Region:

-“Having passed the colonnade of soldiers, four other people and I went into the street in hopes of approaching [the soldiers] to request that they stop attacking the people that were standing there. These vehicles drove at top speed, we just happened to get out of the way... seeing that there were no extremists, but people's deputies, they didn't even slow down, they sped past. We caught up with them again en route to the House of Soviets, near the American Embassy. These armored personnel carriers...their crews opened fire, and not with blanks, but with live rounds. They practically shot right above our heads. The people there at the barricades had already stopped [the soldiers]. People were conducting themselves peacefully, there weren't even any insults...they posed no threat to these soldiers. [The protesters] requested that the soldiers not run anyone over. The shooting continued for several minutes and, after this, the armored personnel carriers advanced on the barricades...Soldiers and officers in the front of the armored personnel carrier were extremely aggressive. An officer removed his magazine, showed the bullets, and said that they were live rounds...we will follow our orders.”

-“We are willing to testify, all five of us, that on the side of the people of Moscow, people that stood at the barricades, there was absolute self-control. Not a single profane word, there were no drunkards, no extremist chants...adults stood there, solid people, not fussy youth or anybody else. The order had been given and the colonnade of armored personnel vehicles knowingly moved in order to provoke bloodshed and then lay blame for that bloodshed on our Supreme Soviet, on us deputies.”

N.V. Kluyev – Satkinski territorial electoral district, Chelyabinskaya oblast:

“Well, such movements, which put soldiers against a peaceful population, should probably be categorically nipped in the bud, even by force. [Soldiers supporting the coup] are criminals, natural criminals, following the orders of state criminals.”

V.N. Lyubimov – Member of the Supreme Soviet (RSFSR), Ryazanski national-territorial electoral district, Ryazanskaya oblast:

“We condemned Afghanistan, we condemned the movement of troops into Czechoslovakia and all the same we are unleashing [forces] at home, in our Russia, in our country.”

“I have been a communist since 1969 and must say that those members of the Central Committee of the CPSU that took this step deserve every possible condemnation from the Soviet people, and not just from a single party.”

V.V. Bakatin – Adviser to the President of the USSR:

“...all of the complexity of this struggle with lawlessness, with unconstitutional movements, is in not escalating the danger of bloodshed and not allowing civil war to be unleashed.”

G.K. Shakhnazarov – People’s Deputy and aide to the President of the USSR:

-“In essence, the state of emergency’s method of implementation only proved (if it proved anything at all) the powerlessness of power. Once again the idea has been proven, one which M.S. Gorbachev tirelessly echoes, that in our society all questions must be settled by political means, in the framework of the constitution and the laws of the country.”

-“Entry into a state of emergency is the same as an airplane’s entry into a nosedive, and it’s just as difficult getting out of either one.”

B.C. Mikhailov – Member of the Supreme Soviet (RSFSR), Djangarski national-territorial electoral district, Kalimskaya Soviet Socialist Republic:

“In history everything is repeated, only at a higher loop on the spiral of development. But for some reason in our state this repetition has set development back several decades and several loops lower. And this scenario or, more accurately, this game, executed by the State Committee of the State of Emergency is reminiscent of scenarios of the Khrushchev era.”

L.B. Gurevich – Murmanskaya national-territorial electoral district, Murmanskaya oblast:

“When I was among the rank and file (with the Tamanskaya division and the Kantemirovskaya division), practically no one even knew the information that had been

broadcast since morning by the media on central television and radio. [The rank and file] didn't know that a coup was taking place or that the president of the USSR was being intentionally kept in isolation. That is to say, the soldiers were intentionally kept in the dark."

A.A. Alekseyev – Kronstadtski territorial electoral district, city of Leningrad:

-“...all of us together, respected people's deputies, along with the Presidium and the Supreme Soviet, are unfortunately unprepared for such extraordinary situations, when dictatorship descends on the country. It should be frankly said that we were stupefied, especially on the first day. It should be said that the [government's representative organs] that [have] now more or less been fixed up [were] almost entirely absent on the first day. And if we draw upon the strategic and tactical views of our adversaries or, in simpler terms, of these state criminals, under more intense pressure they still could have – unfortunately – realized their diabolical plans. Therefore, I would like us – first and foremost the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and the Supreme Soviet along with the president and presidential apparatuses – to draw a suitable conclusion from this experience. It is necessary that we stamp out in an organized fashion our opponents and enemies.”

-“If we are to discuss the main issues following last night, then it can be said that we suffered great losses. We didn't succeed in avoiding bloodshed – three people were killed. But if we are to discuss our triumphs, then such an example can be given. Not everyone, obviously, knows that with the help of the people's deputies of Russia, and with the help of our Muscovites, we took “prisoner”, let's say, nine Soviet Army armored personnel carriers fully stocked with ammunition and personnel.”

R.I. Khasbulatov – First Deputy Chair of the Supreme Soviet (RSFSR):

“Let's think seriously for a moment, does it seem like we have to be [prepared to deal with] conspiracies? (*Noise in the hall*) Should we? Comrades, it's an unusual event, think first and then speak. WE don't have to be [prepared to deal with] conspiracies (*noise in the hall*). In a normal democratic society conspiracies are what, exactly? No, we won't prepare ourselves [to deal with] conspiracies. It's another issue altogether – strengthening our power. Instead of saying that we aren't ready [to deal with] conspiracies, you would have been better off proposing that we nationalize half of the Kremlin (*laughter in the hall*) and from behind the jagged walls of the Kremlin it will be much easier to protect Russian power.”

O.V. Basilashvili – Viborgski territorial electoral district, city of Leningrad:

“Violence was used first and foremost against Russia, against Russians. Everything that's occurring is part of an attempt to return to the rights-less order of the Stalin era. The coup - which cannot be called anything else - that took place was a shameful act in the history of our country. Under these conditions, we consider ourselves indebted by honor and

conscience to support the government of Russia and her president – the highest powers of the Russian state.”

Member of the Supreme Soviet (RSFSR) (Unannounced):

“...Everything that happened was made possible by just one thing...The army found itself in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, their hearts are with us, although they are obligated to follow orders and obey the coup plotters. As such, we should place on the day’s agenda a change in statutes and regulations of all military branches so that servicemen won’t be forced to obey orders that lead to such unconstitutional coups.” (Pg. 37)

-“...This situation...we’re winning, I’m sure of it. The political situation is stabilizing, but what’s next? Let’s think about the future. I surmise that if we fail to quickly carry out reforms, radical reforms, then we will lose in the long run. We will end up in the same situation as the government of the USSR.”

R.I. Khasbulatov – First Deputy Chair of the Supreme Soviet (RSFSR):

-“In these days the eleventh floor of this “White House” turned into a truly integrated brigade of journalists – foreign journalists from the foreign media. And at times there were hours and minutes when we were cut off, only by means of a receiver could we listen to radio “Freedom”, “BBC”, “CNN”, and our citizens could learn something openly, honestly, and objectively. Therefore, in the name of this session of the Supreme Soviet, in the name of every deputy in attendance here, I would like to express deep gratitude to our foreign journalists.”

-“Indeed, when dictatorship arises, the toughest, smartest people...profound people, already start to think about strategic objectives, about long-term developments, and not simply about short-term interests.”

V.A. Rebrikov – Krasnoyarskiy territorial-electoral district, city of Moscow:

“...I consider Moscow as being, first of all, the capital of Russia. In second place, it is the capital of the USSR.”

V.A. Boyko – Member of the Supreme Soviet (RSFSR), Severskiy territorial electoral district, Krasnodarskiy Krai:

“I would like to address Muscovites. During these days they set for us an example of bravery and showed that, indeed, the processes of democratization occurring in this country are irreversible.”

V.I. Gerasimov – Vyborgskiy territorial electoral district, Leningradskaya Oblast:

“Moscow isn’t all of Russia. A debt should be owed noting the courage of those that today and every day have made great efforts. Not just Russian deputies, not just deputies of the USSR, but deputies of local Soviets that, while not having full information, already made a decision on August 19th to support the legally-elected president of Russia with their actions. It was precisely there that we worked during those two days. And if we hadn’t worked there, nobody knows how this situation would have turned out.”

Translated by Matt McGorin for
The National Security Archive