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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the USSR

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Mikhail Gorbachev, USSR President
Interpreter: Dmitri Zarechnak
Notetaker: Ed A. Hewett, NSC Staff

DATE, TIME September 27, 1991, 9:22 - 9:50 am
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Mikhail, how are you? (U)

President Gorbachev: George, hello. I received your letter. I very much want to talk. (U)

The President: Good. First, I want to extend my cordial best wishes. I would like to go through the talking points and get a reaction to them. (S)

President Gorbachev: OK. In general I discussed them with my colleagues from the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and asked them to give me a preliminary analysis. I listened to the experts. (S)

This is a major initiative of the President of the United States. That is my opinion, and that of my closest associates. There is only one thing: you are doing this unilaterally, and you call on us to consider our steps. Is that right? (S)

The President: Yes. Correct. We'll spell out what we do. In some categories, we'll spell out how the Soviet Union could take similar steps. For example, we cancel ICBM's except for single warheads, and would like to say that the Soviet Union is doing the same thing. (S)

On dismantling nuclear warheads, where I propose we open discussions on the safe dismantling of nuclear warheads, on how we might enhance the safety and security of nuclear weapons, and how to improve nuclear command and control. I'd like to say you and I agree that this would be a good thing to do. (S)

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President Gorbachev: George, thank you for those clarifications. Since you're urging that we take steps, I can only give an answer in principle -- since there is much that must be clarified -- and that answer is a positive one. (S)

The President: I understand. How about if I say that I've consulted with Mikhail Gorbachev, and although he has had no time to study my initiative, that I am inclined to believe his response will be positive. (S)

President Gorbachev: I think that will be very good. I wanted to say that since you'll be talking at 8:30 our time, I could go on our news program "Vremia" at 9:00, mention that we've talked, and then on that program give a positive response. (S)

The President: There's just one complication. I won't give the speech now until 8:00 p.m. our time -- 3:00 a.m. your time. I changed that because we wanted to be on prime time so that the majority of the American people could hear it. (S)

President Gorbachev: OK, then I'll respond tomorrow. (C)

The President: Very good. (U)

President Gorbachev: There are certain points on which I have some questions. First, we hope that we will get more detailed information from you on each point. Is that agreed? (S)

The President: Absolutely. (C)

President Gorbachev: Do you have any intention to include other nuclear powers in this process? Are you calling on them to get involved? (S)

The President: I consulted with Major and Mitterand. I haven't asked them to be involved. We will take the lead. It is certainly our intention to consult further with them. (S)

The response from Major and Mitterand, with whom I talked just a few minutes ago, was certainly very positive. But I am not calling on them to do something now. This is more a U.S.-Soviet superpower relationship. (S)

President Gorbachev: That's clear. In connection with your far-reaching proposals, is the question of nuclear testing included? It was one situation when we had many nuclear systems and programs. Not that you are contemplating major reductions, perhaps you consider moves on testing. (S)

The President: We're reluctant on testing. Clearly we will consider the effect of our proposals on testing. We are not talking here about testing, and we will need to be in contact on that. Clearly it will raise the issue in the U.S. and elsewhere. We will need to consult on that. (S)

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President Gorbachev: OK, George. Another point which was not clear to us: does your initiative affect carrier-based arms control and the strategic-based nuclear [naval] fleet? ~~(S)~~

The President: Carrier based nuclear forces, definitely yes. The strategic fleet is not affected. Land-based navy planes will have their nuclear weapons removed from them and from their bases. ~~(S)~~

President Gorbachev: OK, thank you. In conclusion, I would like to know your view on the following question. What forum can we use to clarify the points that arise about the U.S. initiative? When you were here, we talked of setting up a group to discuss strategic stability. Maybe that group is the appropriate one to clarify all remaining questions? ~~(S)~~

The President: That's an interesting idea. I like that. Let me get back to you soon. It should be broader than just military, but obviously the military should be comfortable with this. ~~(S)~~

President Gorbachev: OK. Thank you. I want again to congratulate you on this major proposal. It is a historic initiative, comparable to Reykjavik. ~~(S)~~

The President: I also wanted to run it by Yel'tsin. I don't know where he is. He was on vacation, but I don't know where he is now. ~~(C)~~

We sent him the information. I would like to do the courtesy of calling him. If we miss him, tell him we tried. ~~(C)~~

President Gorbachev: OK, I'll do that George. I also want to say that I appreciated meeting with Jim and discussing with Brady the U.S. financial system. ~~(S)~~

The President: Thank you for the courtesy of receiving them. We're urgently trying to follow up on those conversations. ~~(C)~~

President Gorbachev: Thanks. I sent today information to Major for the G-7, including detailed data on the situation of our balance of payments, debt, and our possibilities. He will be in touch with you to give the information on my behalf. ~~(S)~~

The President: OK. I look forward to seeing it. I am very pleased at your positive response. ~~(C)~~

President Gorbachev: I'm sure. I glad to hear of your significant initiative. Raisa sends her best to Barbara. (U)

The President: Thank you and thank you for sending that fascinating tape. I looked at it with interest. Thank you. (U)

President Gorbachev: Thank you for the flag. That, too, is a reflection of that troubled time. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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