

November 20, 1990

Record of Conversation between M. S. Gorbachev and British Prime Minister M. Thatcher

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Summary:

Gorbachev and Thatcher discuss the potential response through the UN to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

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REPORT OF CONVERSATION

between M.S. Gorbachev and the Prime Minister
of Great Britain, M. Thatcher

Paris, 20 November 1990

M. THATCHER. Mr. President, I have less time than usual with you today. I am very grateful that you found the chance to meet. First, I would like to discuss the situation in the Gulf, and then, the evolution of events in your country. Of course, we are informed of what is happening, but it is very difficult to make a judgment about what is happening.

I know that yesterday you talked about the Gulf with G. Bush. We are agreed as to further actions. But I want to say right away: I do not think that Saddam Hussein will withdraw from Kuwait. He is not that sort of person. At present, he is increasing his troops even more. I understand that the sanctions cannot be fully effective for long. A lot of contraband gets through, especially spare parts, which are very important. Provisions as well get through. In addition, Iraq has large supplies of these.

It is not possible to keep troops for too long in the desert. If it is necessary to resort to the military option, then we must take the weather into account, and also Ramadan, which begins on 12 March. I believe that we will have to turn to the military option in any case. There is a legal basis for this - Article 51 of the UN Charter.

I am not experiencing difficulty in ensuring the support of our public. In our country, the majority understand what sort of a person we are dealing with. People also understand that we can only consider that we have reached our goal when the problem of Iraq's chemical, bacteriological, and nuclear weapons is solved. Otherwise, everything might begin again in three to five years.

I repeat that it is not difficult for me to preserve public support for our position, insofar as I was able successfully to set the tone on this issue. Of course, it would be very good if he withdrew from Kuwait. But he will have to pay for the destruction of this country; and we will still have to resolve the problem of Iraq's military potential.

I know that the USA will achieve the adoption of a Security Council resolution which will sanction the use of force - directly or through a formula on "all necessary means." I know that for the Americans, especially from the point of view of Congress' position, such a resolution is necessary, and it must be carried out while the USA chairs the Council. As I understand, the Soviet Union will agree to the adoption of such a resolution, will not veto it, and, possibly, vote "yes." But you, evidently, would like to announce such a decision at a convenient time for you and in a way that suits you. Do I understand correctly?

M.S. GORBACHEV. First, I want to say that we have no differences regarding the fact that we must cope with this crisis together. I said this yesterday to President Bush, and [now] I tell you: we must untie this knot. From all points of view, it is clear that if we cannot do this, then it will be a blow to the changes which we have attained with such difficulty, to our new relations.

Secondly. It is very important to act through the UN. That is the correct approach which will allow us all to occupy a firmer position.

M. THATCHER. It is true that this makes it easier for some to defend their position inside the country.

M.S. GORBACHEV. Thirdly. Of course, the existing concentration of arms in Iraq and as a whole in the Middle East is unacceptable. For that reason, I support your thought that we must talk not only about the withdrawal of troops, but also about the demilitarization of the region.

How can we attain our goal? I think that truly we are acting responsibly and considerately. We have agreed that at the appropriate time, evidently, in the next few days, it will be necessary again to put this issue to the examination of the UN Security Council in order to analyze the evolution of events and possible actions including a new resolution of the Council.

They are, of course, nuances in the positions. Everyone has them. There was a discussion about China. It is my impression that they will not cast a veto.

M. THATCHER. I agree with that.

M.S. GORBACHEV. The most important thing is that we have to go through to the end together. And the formula of the future resolution must be such that Hussein gets a clear signal that he might encounter some very severe measures. At the same time, the formulations should be such that everyone can support them.

M. THATCHER. That is a difficult balance.

M.S. GORBACHEV. The signal should be clear, even an ultimatum. We must define a date when the ultimatum will be carried out [krainyi srok].

M. THATCHER. I don't much like the idea of such a date. In that case, Saddam can decide to strike a blow with missiles armed with chemical warheads. And in general, he can calculate that during this period [before the grace period elapses] we will act more leniently toward him than we would in the absence of such a cut-off point.

[Subsequent pages omitted from the original].